THE WICKER-WORK WOMAN
BY ANATOLE FRANCE

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/wickerworkwomanc00franiala

This Edition is limited to
Five Hundred Copies for
Sale in the United States
of America

THE WORKS OF ANATOLE FRANCE
IN AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION
EDITED BY FREDERIC CHAPMAN

THE WICKER-WORK WOMAN

THE WICKER WORK WOMAN

A CHRONICLE OF OUR OWN TIMES

BY ANATOLE FRANCE

A TRANSLATION BY
M. P. WILLCOCKS

LONDON: JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD
NEW YORK: JOHN LANE COMPANY: MCMX

WM. BRENDON AND SON, LTD., PRINTERS, PLYMOUTH

THE WICKER-WORK WOMAN

THE WICKER-WORK WOMAN

I

N his study M. Bergeret, professor of literature at the University, was preparing his lesson on the eighth book of the *Æneid* to the shrill mechanical accompaniment of the piano, on which, close by, his daughters were practising a difficult exercise. M. Bergeret's room possessed only one window, but this was a large one, and filled up one whole side. It admitted, however, more draught than light, for the sashes were ill-fitting and the panes darkened by a high contiguous wall. M. Bergeret's table, pushed close against this window, caught the dismal rays of niggard daylight that filtered through. As a matter of fact this study, where the professor polished and repolished his fine, scholarly phrases, was nothing more than a shapeless cranny, or rather a double recess, behind the framework of the main staircase which, spreading out most inconsiderately in a great curve towards

the window, left only room on either side for two useless, churlish corners. Trammelled by this monstrous, green-papered paunch of masonry, M. Bergeret had with difficulty discovered in his cantankerous study—a geometrical abortion as well as an æsthetic abomination—a scanty flat surface where he could stack his books along the deal shelves, upon which yellow rows of Teubner classics were plunged in never-lifted gloom. M. Bergeret himself used to sit squeezed close up against the window, writing in a cold, chilly style that owed much to the bleakness of the atmosphere in which he worked. Whenever he found his papers neither torn nor topsy-turvy and his pens not gaping cross-nibbed, he considered himself a lucky man! For such was the usual result of a visit to the study from Madame Bergeret or her daughters, where they came to write up the laundry list or the household accounts. Here, too, stood the dressmaker's dummy, on which Madame Bergeret used to drape the skirts she cut out at home. There, bolt upright, over against the learned editions of Catullus and Petronius, stood, like a symbol of the wedded state, this wicker-work woman.

M. Bergeret was preparing his lesson on the eighth book of the *Æneid*, and he ought to have been devoting himself exclusively to the fascinating

details of metre and language. In this task he would have found, if not joy, at any rate mental peace and the priceless balm of spiritual tranquillity. Instead, he had turned his thoughts in another direction : he was musing on the soul, the genius, the outward features of that classic world whose books he spent his life in studying. He had given himself up to the longing to behold with his own eyes those golden shores, that azure sea, those rose-hued mountains, those lovely meadows through which the poet leads his heroes. He was bemoaning himself bitterly that it had never been his lot to visit the shores where once Troy stood, to gaze on the landscape of Virgil, to breathe the air of Italy, of Greece and holy Asia, as Gaston Boissier and Gaston Deschamps had done. The melancholy aspect of his study overwhelmed him and great waves of misery submerged his mind. His sadness was, of course, the fruit of his own folly, for all our real sorrows come from within and are self-caused. We mistakenly believe that they come from outside, but we create them within ourselves from our own personality.

So sat M. Bergeret beneath the huge plaster cylinder, manufacturing his own sadness and weariness as he reflected on his narrow, cramped, and dismal life : his wife was a vulgar creature, who had by now lost all her good looks ; his daughters,

even, had no love for him, and finally the battles of Æneas and Turnus were dull and boring. At last he was aroused from this melancholy train of thought by the arrival of his pupil, M. Roux, who made his appearance in red trousers and a blue coat, for he was still going through his year of military service.

"Ha!" said M. Bergeret, "so I see they've turned my best Latin scholar into a hero."

And when M. Roux denied the heroic impeachment, the professor persisted: "I know what I'm talking about. I call a man who wears a sabre a hero, and I'm quite right in so doing. And if you only wore a busby, I should call you a great hero. The least one can decently do is to bestow a little flattery on the people one sends out to get shot. One couldn't possibly pay them for their services at a cheaper rate. But may you never be immortalised by any act of heroism, and may you only earn the praises of mankind by your attainments in Latin verse! It is my patriotism, and nothing else, that moves me to this sincere wish. For I am persuaded by the study of history that heroism is mainly to be found among the routed and vanquished. Even the Romans, a people by no means so eager for war as is commonly supposed, a people, too, who were often beaten, even the Romans only produced a Decius in a moment

of defeat. At Marathon, too, the heroism of Kynegeirus was shown precisely at the moment of disaster for the Athenians, who, if they did succeed in arresting the march of the barbarian army, could not prevent them from embarking with all the Persian cavalry which had just been recuperating on the plains. Besides, it is not at all clear that the Persians made any special effort in this battle."

M. Roux deposited his sabre in a corner of the study and sat down in a chair offered him by the professor.

"It is now four months," said he, "since I have heard a single intelligent word. During these four months I have been concentrating all the powers of my mind on the task of conciliating my corporal and my sergeant-major by carefully calculated tips. So far, that is the only side of the art of warfare that I can really say I have mastered. It is, however, the most important side. Yet I have in the process lost all power of grasping a general idea or of following a subtle thought. And here you are, my dear sir, telling me that the Greeks were conquered at Marathon and that the Romans were not warlike. My head whirls."

M. Bergeret calmly replied :

"I merely said that Miltiades did not succeed in breaking through the forces of the barbarians. As

for the Romans, they were not essentially a military people, since they made profitable and lasting conquests, in contradistinction to the true military nations, such as the French, for instance, who seize all, but retain nothing.

"It is also to be noted that in Rome, in the time of the kings, aliens were not allowed to serve as soldiers. But in the reign of the good king Servius Tullius the citizens, being by no means anxious to reserve to themselves alone the honour of fatigue and perils, admitted aliens resident in the city to military service. There are such things as heroes, but there are no nations of heroes, nor are there armies of heroes. Soldiers have never marched save under penalty of death. Military service was hateful even to those Latin herdsmen who gained for Rome the sovereignty of the world and the glorious name of goddess among the nations. The wearing of the soldier's belt was to them such a hardship that the very name of this belt, *ærumna*, eventually expressed for them the ideas of dejection, weariness of body and mind, wretchedness, misfortune and disaster. When well led they made, not heroes, but good soldiers and good navvies; little by little they conquered the world and covered it with roads and highways. The Romans never sought glory: they had no imagination. They only waged absolutely neces-

sary wars in defence of their own interests. Their triumph was the triumph of patience and good sense.

"The make of a man is shown by his ruling passion. With soldiers, as with all crowds, the ruling passion, the predominant thought, is fear. They go to meet the enemy as the foe from whom the least danger is to be feared. Troops in line are so drawn up on both sides that flight is impossible. In that lies all the art of battle. The armies of the Republic were victorious because the discipline of the olden times was maintained in them with the utmost severity, while it was relaxed in the camp of the Allied Armies. Our generals of the second year after the Revolution were none other than sergeants like that la Ramée who used to have half a dozen conscripts shot every day in order to encourage the others, as Voltaire put it, and to arouse them with the trumpet-note of patriotism."

"That's very plausible," said M. Roux. "But there is another point. There is such a thing as the innate joy of firing a musket-shot. As you know, my dear sir, I am by no means a destructive animal. I have no taste for military life. I have even very advanced humanitarian ideas, and I believe that the brotherhood of the nations will be brought about by the triumph of socialism.

In a word, I am filled with the love of humanity. But as soon as they put a musket in my hand I want to fire at everyone. It's in the blood. . . ."

M. Roux was a fine hearty fellow who had quickly shaken down in his regiment. Violent exercise suited his robust temperament, and being in addition very adaptable, although he had acquired no special taste for the profession, he found life in barracks quite bearable, and so remained both healthy and happy.

"You have left the power of suggestion out of your calculations, sir," said he. "Only give a man a bayonet at the end of a musket and he will instantly be ready to plunge it into the body of the first comer and so make himself a hero, as you call it."

The rich southern tones of M. Roux were still echoing through the room when Madame Bergeret came in. As a rule she seldom entered the study when her husband was there. To-day M. Bergeret noticed that she wore her fine pink and white *peignoir*.

Expressing great surprise at finding M. Roux in the study, she explained that she had just come in to ask her husband for a volume of poems with which she might while away an hour or two.

She was suddenly a charming, good-tempered woman : the professor noticed the fact, as a fact, though he felt no special interest in it.

Removing Freund's Dictionary from an old leather arm-chair, M. Roux cleared a seat for Madame Bergeret, while her husband's thoughts strayed, first to the quartos stacked against the wall and then to his wife who had taken their place in the arm-chair. These two masses of matter, the dictionary and the lady, thought he, were once but gases floating in the primitive nebulosity. Though now they are strangely different from one another in look, in nature and in function, they were once for long ages exactly similar.

"For," thought he to himself, "Madame Bergeret once swam in the vasty abyss of the ages, shapeless, unconscious, scattered in light gleams of oxygen and carbon. At the same time, the molecules that were one day to make up this Latin dictionary were whirling in this same vapour, which was destined at last to give birth to monstrous forms, to minute insects and to a slender thread of thought. These imperfect and often harassing creations, these monuments of my weary life, my wife and my dictionary, needed the travail of eternity to produce them. Yet Amélie is just a paltry mind in a coarsened body, and my dictionary is full of mistakes. We can see from this example alone that there is very little hope that even new æons of time would ever give us

perfect knowledge and beauty. As it is, we live but for a moment, yet by living for ever we should gain nothing. The faults we see in nature, and how faulty she is we know, are produced neither by time nor space!"

And in the restless perturbation of his thoughts M. Bergeret continued:

"But what is time itself, save just the movements of nature, and how can I judge whether these are long or short? Granted that nature is cruel in her cast-iron laws, how comes it that I recognise the fact? And how do I manage to place myself outside her, so that I can weigh her deeds in my scales? Had I but another standpoint in it, perchance the universe might even seem to me a happier place."

M. Bergeret hereupon suddenly emerged from his day-dream, and leant forward to push the tottering pile of quartos close against the wall.

"You are somewhat sunburnt, Monsieur Roux," said Madame Bergeret, "and rather thinner, I fancy. But it suits you well enough."

"The first few months are trying," answered M. Roux. "Drill, of course, in the barrack-yard at six o'clock in the morning and with eight degrees of frost is rather a painful process, and just at first one finds it difficult to look on the mess as appetising. But weariness is, after all, a great blessing,

stupefaction a priceless remedy and the stupor in which one lives is as soporific as a feather-bed. And because at night one only sleeps in snatches, by day one is never wide awake. And this state of automatic lethargy in which we all live is admirably conducive to discipline, it suits the tone of military life and produces physical and moral efficiency in the ranks."

In short, M. Roux had nothing to complain of, but one of his friends, a certain Deval, a student of Malay at the school of Oriental languages, was plunged in the depths of misery and despair. Deval, an intelligent, well-educated, intrepid man, was cursed with a sort of rigidity of mind and body that made him tactless and awkward. In addition to this he was harassed by a painfully exact sense of justice which gave him peculiar views of his rights and duties. This unfortunate turn of mind landed him in all sorts of troubles, and he had not been more than twenty-four hours in barracks before Sergeant Lebrec demanded, in terms which must needs be softened for Madame Bergeret's sake, what ill-conducted being had given birth to such a clumsy cub as Number Five. It took Deval a long time to make sure that he, and none other, was actually Number Five. He had, in fact, to be put under arrest before he was convinced on the subject. Even then he could not see

why the honour of Madame Deval, his mother, should be called in question because he himself was not exactly in line. His sense of justice was outraged by his mother's being unexpectedly declared responsible in this matter, and at the end of four months he was still a prey to melancholy amazement at the idea.

"Your friend Deval," answered M. Bergeret, "put a wrong construction on a warlike speech that I should be inclined to count among those which exalt men's moral tone. Such speeches, in fact, arouse the spirit of emulation by exciting a desire to earn the good-conduct stripes, which confer on their wearers the right to make similar speeches in their turn, speeches which obviously stamp the speaker of them as head and shoulders above those humble beings to whom they are addressed. The authority of officers in the army should never be weakened, as was done in a recent circular issued by a War Minister, which laid down the law that officers and non-commissioned officers were to avoid the practice of addressing the men with the contemptuous 'thou.' The minister, himself a well-bred, courteous, urbane and honourable man, was full of the idea of the dignified position of the citizen soldier and failed, therefore, to perceive that the power of scorning an inferior is the guiding principle in emulation and the

foundation-stone of all governance. Sergeant Lebrec spoke like a hero who is schooling heroes, for, being a philologist, I am able to reconstruct the original form his speech took. This being the case, I have no hesitation in declaring that, in my opinion, Sergeant Lebrec rose to sublimity when he associated the good fame of a family with the port of a conscript, when he thus linked the life of Number Five, even before he saw the light, with the regiment and the flag. For, in truth, does not the issue of all warfare rest on the discipline of the recruit?

"After this, you will probably tell me that I am indulging in the weakness common to all commentators and reading into the text of my author meanings which he never intended. I grant you that there is a certain element of unconsciousness in Sergeant Lebrec's memorable speech. But therein lies the genius of it. Unaware of his own range, he hurls his bolts broadcast."

M. Roux answered with a smile that there certainly was an unconscious element in Sergeant Lebrec's inspiration. He quite agreed with M. Bergeret there. But Madame Bergeret interposed drily:

"I don't understand you at all, Lucien. You always laugh when there is nothing funny, and really one never knows whether you are joking or

serious. It's positively impossible to talk rationally to you."

"My wife reasons after the dean's fashion," said M. Bergeret, "and the only thing to do with either is to give in."

"Ah!" exclaimed Madame Bergeret, "you do well to talk about the dean! You have always set yourself to annoy him and now you are paying for your folly. You have also managed to fall out with the rector. I met him on Sunday when I was out with the girls and he hardly so much as bowed." And turning towards the young soldier, she continued:

"I know that my husband is very much attached to you, Monsieur Roux. You are his favourite pupil and he foretells a brilliant future for you."

M. Roux's swarthy face, with its mat of frizzy hair, flashed into a bold smile that showed the brilliant whiteness of his teeth.

"Do try, Monsieur Roux, to get my husband to use a little tact with people who may be useful to him. His conduct is making life a howling wilderness for us all."

"Surely not, Madame," murmured M. Roux, turning the conversation.

"The peasants," said he, "drag out a wretched three years of service. They suffer horribly, but no one ever guesses it, for they are quite inarticu-

late when it comes to expressing subtleties. Loving the land as they do with all the intensity of animal passion, when they are separated from it their existence is full of deep, silent, monotonous melancholy, with nothing whatever to distract them from their sense of exile and imprisonment, save fear of their officers and weariness of their occupation. Everything around them is strange and incomprehensible. In my company, for instance, there are two Bretons who have not learnt the colonel's name after six months' training. Every morning we are drawn up before the sergeant to repeat this name with them, for every one in the regiment receives exactly the same instruction. Our colonel's name is Dupont. It's the same in all our exercises: quick, clever men are kept back for ever to wait for the dolts."

M. Bergeret inquired whether, like Sergeant Lebrec, the officers also cultivated the art of martial eloquence.

"Not at all," said M. Roux. "My captain—quite a young man he is, too—is the very pink of courtesy. He is an æsthete, a Rosicrucian, and he paints pictures of angels and pallid virgins, against a background of pink and green skies. I devise the legends for his pictures, and whilst Deval is on fatigue-duty in the barrack-square, I am on duty with the captain, who employs me to

produce verses for him. He really is a charming fellow. His name is Marcel de Lagère; he exhibits at L'Œuvre under the pseudonym of Cyne."

"Is he a hero too?" asked M. Bergeret.

"Say rather a Saint George," answered M. Roux. "He has conceived a mystic ideal of the military profession and declares that it is the perfect way of life. We are marching, unawares, to an unknown goal. Piously, solemnly, chastely, we advance towards the altar of mystic, fated sacrifice. He is exquisite. I am teaching him to write *vers libre* and prose poems and he is beginning to compose prose sketches of military life. He is happy, placid and gentle, and the only sorrow he has is the flag. He considers its red, white and blue an intolerably violent colour scheme and yearns for one of rose-pink or lilac. His dreams are of the banner of Heaven. 'If even,' he says sadly, 'the three colours rose from a flower-stalk, like the three flames of the oriflamme, it would be bearable. But when they are perpendicular, they cut the floating folds painfully and ridiculously.' He suffers, but he bears his suffering bravely and patiently. As I said before, he is a true Saint George."

"From your description," said Madame Bergeret, "I feel keenly for the poor young man."

So speaking, she threw a severe glance in M. Bergeret's direction.

"But aren't the other officers amazed at him?" asked M. Bergeret.

"Not at all," answered M. Roux. "For at mess, or in society, he says nothing about his opinions and he looks just like any other officer."

"And what do the men think of him?"

"The men never come in contact with their officers in quarters."

"You will dine with us, won't you, Monsieur Roux?" said Madame Bergeret. "It will give us great pleasure if you will stay."

Her words instantly suggested to M. Bergeret's mind the vision of a pie, for whenever Madame Bergeret had informally invited anyone to dinner she always ordered a pie from Magloire, the pastry-cook, and usually a pie without meat, as being more dainty. By a purely mental impetus that had no connection with greed, M. Bergeret now called up a picture of an egg or fish pie, smoking in a blue-patterned dish on a damask napkin. Homely and prophetic vision! But if Madame Bergeret invited M. Roux to dinner, she must think a great deal of him, for it was most unusual for Amélie to offer the pleasures of her humble table to a stranger. She dreaded the expense and fuss of doing so, and justly, for the days when she

had a guest to dinner were made hideous by the noise of broken dishes, by yells of alarm and tears of rage from the young maid, Euphémie, by an acrid smoke-reek that filled the whole flat and by a smell of cooking which found its way to the study and disturbed M. Bergeret among the shades of Æneas, Turnus, and the bashful Lavinia. However, the professor was delighted at the idea that his pupil, M. Roux, would feed to-night at his table. For there was nothing he liked better than men's talk, and a long discussion filled him with joy.

Madame Bergeret continued :

"You know, Monsieur Roux, it will be just pot-luck."

Then she departed to give Euphémie her orders.

"My dear sir," said M. Bergeret to his pupil, "are you still asserting the pre-eminence of *vers libre?* Of course, I am aware that poetic forms vary according to time and place. Nor am I ignorant of the fact that, in the course of ages, French verse has undergone incessant alterations, and, hidden behind my books of notes on metre, I can smile discreetly at the pious prejudices of the poets who refuse to allow anyone to lay an unhallowed finger on the instrument consecrated by their genius. I have noticed that they give no reasons for the rules they follow, and I am inclined

to think that one must not search for these reasons in the verse itself, but rather in the music which in primitive times accompanied it. It is the scientific spirit which I acknowledge as my guide, and as that is naturally far less conservative than the artistic spirit, I am therefore ready to welcome innovations. But I must, nevertheless, confess that *vers libre* baffles me and I cannot even grasp the definition of it. The vagueness of the limits to which it must conform is a worry to me and . . ."

At that moment a visitor came into the study. It was a well-built man in the prime of life, with handsome sunburnt features. Captain Aspertini of Naples was a student of philology and agriculture and a member of the Italian Parliament who for the last ten years had been carrying on a learned correspondence with M. Bergeret, after the style of the great scholars of the Renaissance and the seventeenth century, and whenever he visited France he made it his practice to come and see his correspondent. Savants the world over held a high opinion of Carlo Aspertini for having deciphered a complete treatise by Epicurus on one of the charred scrolls from Pompeii. Although his energies were now absorbed in agriculture, politics and business, he was still passionately devoted to the art of numismatics and his sensitive hands still

itched to have the fingering of medals. Indeed, there were two attractions which drew him to * * *—the pleasure of seeing M. Bergeret and the delight of looking once more at the priceless collection of ancient coins bequeathed to the town library by Boucher de La Salle. He also came to collate the letters of Muratori which were preserved there. The two men greeted each other with great pleasure, for a common love of knowledge had made them fellow-citizens. Then, when the Neapolitan perceived that they had a soldier with them in the study, M. Bergeret hastened to inform him that this Gallic warrior was a budding philologist, inspired by enthusiasm for the Latin tongue.

"This year, however," said M. Bergeret, "he is learning in a barrack-square to put one foot before the other, and in him you see what our witty commandant, General Cartier de Chalmot, calls the primary tool of tactics, commonly known as a soldier. My pupil, M. Roux, is a warrior, and having a high-bred soul, he feels the honour of the position. Truth to tell, it is an honour which he shares at this identical moment with all the young men of haughty Europe. Your Neapolitans, too, rejoice in it, since they became part of a great nation."

"Without wishing in any way to show disloyalty

to the house of Savoy, to which I am genuinely attached," said the captain, "I feel that military service and taxation weigh so heavily on the Neapolitans as to make them sometimes regret the happy days of King Bomba and the pleasure of living ingloriously under an easy-going government. Neither tax nor conscription is popular with the Neapolitan. What is wanted is that statesmen should really open their eyes to the necessities of national life. But, as you know, I have always been an opponent of megalomaniac politics and have always deplored those great armaments which hinder all progress in Europe, whether it be intellectual, moral, or material. It is a great, a ruinous folly which can only culminate in farce."

"I foresee no end to it at all," replied M. Bergeret. "No one wishes it to end save certain thinkers who have no means of making their ideas known. The rulers of states cannot desire disarmament, for such a movement would render their position difficult and precarious and would take an admirable tool of empire out of their hands. For armed nations meekly submit to government. Military discipline shapes them to obedience, and in a nation so disciplined, neither insurrections, nor riots, nor tumults of any kind need be feared. When military service is obligatory upon all, when all the citizens either are, or have been,

soldiers, then all the forces of social life are so calculated as to support power, or even the lack of it. This fact the history of France can prove."

Just as M. Bergeret reached this point in his political reflections, from the kitchen close by there burst out the noise of grease pouring over on the fire; from this the professor inferred that the youthful Euphémie, according to her usual practice on gala days, had upset her saucepan on the stove, after rashly balancing it on a pyramid of coal. He had learnt by now that such an event must recur again and again with the inexorable certainty of the laws that govern the universe. A shocking smell of burnt meat filled the study, while M. Bergeret traced the course of his ideas as follows:

"Had not Europe," said he, "been turned into a barrack, we should have seen insurrections bursting out in France, Germany, or Italy, as they did in former times. But nowadays those obscure forces which from time to time uplift the very pavements of our city find regular vent in the fatigue duty of barrack-yards, in the grooming of horses and the sentiment of patriotism.

"The rank of corporal supplies an admirable outlet for the energies of young heroes who, had they been left in freedom, would have been building barricades to keep their arms lissom. I have only this moment been told of the sublime

speeches made by a certain Sergeant Lebrec. Were he dressed in the peasant's blouse this hero would be thirsting for liberty, but clad in a uniform, it is tyranny for which he yearns, and to help in the maintenance of order the thing for which he craves. In armed nations it is easy enough to preserve internal peace, and you will notice that, although in the course of the last twenty-five years, Paris has been a little agitated on one occasion, it was only when the commotion was the work of a War Minister. That is, a general was able to do what a demagogue could not have done. And the moment this general lost his hold on the army, he also lost it on the nation, and his power was gone. Therefore, whether the State be a monarchy, an empire, or a republic, its rulers have an interest in keeping up obligatory military service for all, in order that they may command an army, instead of governing a nation.

"And, while the rulers have no desire for disarmament, the people have lost all wish for it, too. The masses endure military service quite willingly, for, without being exactly pleasurable, it gives an outlet to the rough, crude instincts of the majority and presents itself as the simplest, roughest and strongest expression of their sense of duty. It overawes them by the gorgeous splendour of its outward paraphernalia and by the amount of metal

used in it. In short, it exalts them through the only ideals of power, of grandeur and of glory, which they are capable of conceiving. Often they rush into it with a song; if not, they are perforce driven to it. For these reasons I foresee no termination to this honourable calling which is brutalising and impoverishing Europe."

"There are," said Captain Aspertini, "two ways out of it: war and bankruptcy."

"War!" exclaimed M. Bergeret. "It is patent that great armaments only hinder that by aggravating the horrors of it and rendering it of doubtful issue for both combatants. As for bankruptcy, I foretold it the other day to Abbé Lantaigne, the principal of our high seminary, as we sat on a bench on the Mall. But you need not pin your faith on me. You have studied the history of the Lower Empire too deeply, my dear Aspertini, not to be perfectly aware that, in questions of national finance, there are mysterious resources which escape the scrutiny of political economists. A ruined nation may exist for five hundred years on robbery and extortion, and how is one to guess what a great people, out of its poverty, will manage to supply to its defenders in the way of cannon, muskets, bad bread, bad shoes, straw and oats?"

"This argument sounds plausible enough," answered Aspertini. "Yet, with all due deference

to your opinion, I believe I can already discern the dawn of universal peace."

Then, in a sing-song voice, the kindly Neapolitan began to describe his hopes and dreams for the future, to the accompaniment of the heavy thumping of the chopper with which the youthful Euphémie was preparing a mince for M. Roux on the kitchen table just the other side of the wall.

"Do you remember, Monsieur Bergeret," said Captain Aspertini, "the place in *Don Quixote* where Sancho complains of being obliged to endure a never-ending series of misfortunes and the ready-witted knight tells him that this protracted wretchedness is merely a sign that happiness is at hand? 'For,' says he, 'fortune is a fickle jade and our troubles have already lasted so long that they must soon give place to good-luck.' The law of change alone . . ."

The rest of these optimistic utterances was lost in the boiling over of the kettle of water, followed by the unearthly yells of Euphémie, as she fled in terror from her stove.

Then M. Bergeret's mind, saddened by the sordid ugliness of his cramped life, fell to dreaming of a villa where, on white terraces overlooking the blue waters of a lake, he might hold peaceful converse with M. Roux and Captain Aspertini, amid the scent of myrtles, when the amorous moon rides

high in a sky as clear as the glance of a god and as sweet as the breath of a goddess.

But he soon emerged from this dream and began once more to take part in the discussion.

"The results of war," said he, "are quite incalculable. My good friend William Harrison writes to me that French scholarship has been despised in England since 1871, and that at the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge and Dublin it is the fashion to ignore Maurice Raynouard's text-book of archæology, though it would be more helpful to their students than any other similar work. But they refuse to learn from the vanquished. And in order that they may feel confidence in a professor when he speaks on the characteristics of the art of Ægina or on the origins of Greek pottery, it is considered necessary that he should belong to a nation which excels in the casting of cannon. Because Marshal Mac-Mahon was beaten in 1870 at Sedan and General Chanzy lost his army at the Maine in the same year, my colleague Maurice Raynouard is banished from Oxford in 1897. Such are the results of military inferiority, slow-moving and illogical, yet sure in their effects. And it is, alas, only too true that the fate of the Muses is settled by a sword-thrust."

"My dear sir," said Aspertini, "I am going to

answer you with all the frankness permissible in a friend. Let us first grant that French thought circulates freely through the world, as it has always done. And although the archæological manual of your learned countryman Maurice Raynouard may not have found a place on the desks of the English Universities, yet your plays are acted in all the theatres of the world; the novels of Alphonse Daudet and of Émile Zola are translated into every language; the canvases of your painters adorn the galleries of two worlds; the achievements of your scientists win renown in every quarter of the globe. And if your soul no longer thrills the soul of the nations, if your voice no longer quickens the heart-beats of mankind, it is because you no longer choose to play the part of apostles of brotherhood and justice, it is because you no longer utter the holy words that bring strength and consolation; it is because France is no longer the lover of the human race, the comrade of the nations; it is because she no longer opens her hands to fling broadcast those seeds of liberty which once she scattered in such generous and sovereign fashion that for long years it seemed that every beautiful human idea was a French idea; it is because she is no longer the France of the philosophers and of the Revolution: in the garrets round the Panthéon and the Luxembourg there are

no longer to be found young leaders, writing on deal tables night after night, with all the fire of youth, those pages which make the nations tremble and the despots grow pale with fear. Do not then complain that the glory which you cannot view without misgivings has passed away.

"Especially, do not say that your defeats are the sources of your misfortunes: say, rather, that they are the outcome of your faults. A nation suffers no more injury from a battle lost than a robust man suffers from a sword-scratch received in a duel. It is an injury that only produces a transient illness in the system, a perfectly curable weakness. To cure it, all that is needed is a little courage, skill and political good sense. The first act of policy, the most necessary and certainly the easiest, is to make the defeat yield all the military glory it is capable of producing. For in the true view of things, the glory of the vanquished equals that of the conquerors, and it is, in addition, the more moving spectacle. In order to make the best of a disaster it is desirable to fête the general and the army which has sustained it, and to blazon abroad all the beautiful incidents which prove the moral superiority of misfortune. Such incidents are to be found even in the most headlong retreats. From the very first moment, then, the defeated side ought to decorate, to embellish, to gild their

defeat, and to distinguish it with unmistakably grand and beautiful symbols. In Livy it may be read how the Romans never failed to do this, and how they hung palms and wreaths on the swords broken at the battles of the Trebbia, of Trasimene and of Cannæ. Even the disastrous inaction of Fabius has been so extolled by them that, after the lapse of twenty-two centuries, we still stand amazed at the wisdom of the Cunctator, the Lingerer, as he was nicknamed. Yet, after all, he was nothing but an old fool. In this lies the great art of defeat."

"It is by no means a lost art," said M. Bergeret. "In our own days Italy showed that she knew how to practise it after Novara, after Lissa, after Adowa."

"My dear sir," said Captain Aspertini, "whenever an Italian army capitulates, we rightly reckon this capitulation glorious. A government which succeeds in throwing a glamour of poetry over a defeat rouses the spirit of patriotism within the country and at the same time makes itself interesting in the eyes of foreigners. And to bring about these two results is a fairly considerable achievement. In the year 1870 it rested entirely with you Frenchmen to produce them for yourselves. After Sedan, had the Senate, the Chamber of Deputies, and all the State officials publicly

and unanimously congratulated the Emperor Napoleon and Marshal Mac-Mahon on not having despaired of the salvation of their country when they gave battle to the enemy, do you not think that France would have gained a radiant halo of glory from the defeat of its army? At the same time it would have given forcible expression of its will to conquer. And pray believe, dear Monsieur Bergeret, that I am not impertinent enough to be trying to give your country lessons in patriotism. In doing that, I should be putting myself in a wrong position. I am merely presenting you with some of the marginal notes that will be found, after my death, pencilled in my copy of Livy."

"It is not the first time," said M. Bergeret, "that the commentary on the Decades has been worth more than the text. But go on."

With a smile Captain Aspertini once more took up the thread of his argument.

"The wisest thing for the country to do is to cast huge handfuls of lilies over the wounds of war. Then, skilfully and silently, with a swift glance, she will examine the wound. If the blow has been a knock-down one, and if the strength of the country is seriously impaired, she will instantly start negotiating. In treating with the victorious side, it will be found that the earliest moment is

the most propitious. In the first surprise of triumph, the enemy welcomes with joy any proposal which tends to turn a favourable beginning into a definite advantage. He has not yet had time for repeated successes to go to his head, nor for long-continued resistance to drive him to rage. He will not demand huge damages for an injury that is still trifling, nor, as yet, have his budding aspirations had time to grow. It is possible that even under these circumstances he may not grant you peace on easy terms. But you are sure to have to pay dearer for it, if you delay in applying for it. The wisest policy is to open negotiations before one has revealed all one's weakness. It is possible then to obtain easy terms, which are usually rendered easier still by the intervention of neutral powers. As for seeking safety in despair and only making peace after a victory, these ideas are doubtless fine enough as maxims, but very difficult to carry out at a time when, for one thing, the industrial and commercial needs of modern life, and for another, the immense size of the armies which have to be equipped and fed, do not permit an indefinite continuance of warfare, and consequently do not leave the weaker side enough time to straighten out its affairs. France in 1870 was inspired by the noblest of sentiments, but if she had acted in accordance with reason, she would

have started negotiations immediately after her first reverses, honourable as they were. She had a government which could have undertaken the task, and which ought to have done so, a government which was, indeed, in a better position for bringing it to a successful issue than any that might follow. The sensible thing to have done would have been to exact this last service from it before getting rid of it altogether. Instead, they acted the wrong way about. After having maintained that government for twenty years, France conceived the ill-considered notion of overturning it just at the very moment when it ought to have been useful to her, and of substituting another government for it. This administration, not being jointly liable with the former one, had to begin the war over again, without, however, bringing any new strength to its prosecution. After that a third government tried to establish itself.

"If it had succeeded, the war would have begun again a third time, because the first two unfortunate attempts did not count. Honour, say you, must be satisfied. But you had given satisfaction with your blood to two honours: the honour of the Empire, as well as of the Republic; you were also ready to satisfy a third, the honour of the Commune. Yet it seems to me that even the proudest nation in the world has but one honour

to satisfy. You were thrown by this excess of generosity into a state of great weakness from which you are now happily recovering. . . ."

"In fact," said M. Bergeret, "if Italy had been beaten at Weissenburg and at Reichshoffen, these defeats would have been as valuable to her as the whole of Belgium. But we are a people of heroes, who always fancy that we have been betrayed. That sums up our history. Take note also of the fact that we are a democracy; and that is the state in which negotiations present most difficulties. Nobody can, however, deny that we made a long and courageous stand. Moreover, we have a reputation for magnanimity, and I believe we deserve it. Anyhow, the feats of the human race have always been but melancholy farces, and the historians who pretend to discover any sequence in the flow of events are merely great rhetoricians. Bossuet . . ."

Just as M. Bergeret was uttering this name the study door opened with such a crash that the wicker-work woman was upheaved by it and fell at the feet of the astonished young soldier. Then there appeared in the doorway a ruddy, squint-eyed wench, with no forehead worth mentioning. Her sturdy ugliness shone with the glow of youth and health. Her round cheeks and bare arms were a fine military red. Planting herself in front of

M. Bergeret, she brandished the coal-shovel and shouted :

"I'm off!"

Euphémie, having quarrelled with Madame Bergeret, was now giving notice. She repeated :

"I'm going off home!"

Said M. Bergeret :

"Then go quietly, my child."

Again and again she shouted :

"I'm off! Madame wants to turn me into a regular beast of burden."

Then, lowering her shovel, she added in lower tones :

"Besides, things are always happening here that I would rather not see."

Without attempting to unravel the mystery of these words, M. Bergeret merely remarked that he would not delay her, and that she could go.

"Well, then, give me my wages."

"Leave the room," answered M. Bergeret. "Don't you see that I have something to do besides settling with you? Go and wait elsewhere."

But Euphémie, once more waving the dull, heavy shovel, yelled :

"Give me my money! My wages! I want my wages!"

II

T six o'clock in the evening Abbé Guitrel got out of the train in Paris and called a cab in the station-yard. Then, driving in the dusk through the murky, rain-swept streets, dotted with lights, he made for Number 5, Rue des Boulangers. There, in a narrow, rugged, hilly street, above the coopers and the cork-dealers, and amidst a smell of casks, lived his old friend Abbé Le Génil, chaplain to the Convent of the Seven Wounds, who was a popular Lenten preacher in one of the most fashionable parishes in Paris. Here Abbé Guitrel was in the habit of putting up, whenever he visited Paris in the hope of expediting the progress of his tardy fortunes. All day long the soles of his buckled shoes tapped discreetly upon the pavements, staircases and floors of all sorts of different houses. In the evening he supped with M. Le Génil. The two old comrades from the seminary spun each other merry yarns, chatted over the rates charged for

mass and sermon, and played their game of manille. At ten o'clock Nanette, the maid, rolled into the dining-room an iron bedstead for M. Guitrel, who always gave her when he left the same tip—a brand-new twenty-sou piece.

On this occasion, as in the past, M. Le Génil, who was a tall, stout man, smacked his great hand down on Guitrel's flinching shoulder, and rumbling out a good-day in his deep organ note, instantly challenged him in his usual jolly style :

"Well, old miser, have you brought me twelve dozen masses at a crown each, or are you, as usual, going to keep to yourself the gold that your pious provincials swamp you with ?"

Being a poor man, and knowing that Guitrel was as poor as himself, he regarded this sort of talk as a good jest.

Guitrel went so far as to understand a joke, though, being of a gloomy temperament, he never jested himself. He had, he explained, been obliged to come to Paris to carry out several commissions with which he had been charged, more especially the purchase of books. Would his friend, then, put him up for a day or two, three at the most ?

"Now do tell the truth for once in your life !" answered M. Le Génil. "You have just come up to smell out a mitre, you old fox ! To-morrow

morning you will be showing yourself to the nuncio with a sanctimonious expression. Guitrel, you are going to be a bishop!"

Hereupon the chaplain of the Convent of the Seven Wounds, the preacher at the church of Sainte-Louise, made a bow to the future bishop. Mingled with his ironic courtesy there was, perhaps, a certain strain of instinctive deference. Then once more his face fell into the harsh lines that revealed the temperament of a second Olivier Maillard.[1]

"Come in, then! Will you take some refreshment?"

M. Guitrel was a reserved man, whose compressed lips showed his determination not to be pumped. As a matter of fact, it was quite true that he had come up to enlist powerful influence in support of his candidature, but he had no wish to explain all his wily courses to this naturally frank friend of his. For M. Le Génil made, not only a virtue of his natural frankness, but even a policy.

M. Guitrel stammered:

"Don't imagine . . . dismiss this notion that . . ."

[1] An eccentric priest of the fifteenth century. His sermons were full of denunciations against his enemies. He once attacked Louis XI, who threatened to throw him into the Seine. Maillard replied: "The King is master, but tell him that I shall get to heaven by water sooner than he will by his post-horses."

M. Le Génil shrugged his shoulders, exclaiming, "You old mystery-monger!"

Then, conducting his friend to his bedroom, he sat down once more beneath the light of his lamp and resumed his interrupted task, which was that of mending his breeches.

M. Le Génil, popular preacher as he was both in Paris and Versailles, did his own mending, partly to save his old servant the trouble and partly because he was fond of handling a needle, a taste he had acquired during the years of grinding poverty that he had endured when he first entered the Church. And now this giant with lungs of brass, who fulminated against atheists from the elevation of a pulpit, was meekly sitting on a rush-bottomed chair, occupied in drawing a needle in and out with his huge red hands. In the midst of his task he raised his head and glancing shyly towards Guitrel with his big, kindly eyes, exclaimed:

"We'll have a game of manille to-night, you old trickster."

But Guitrel, hesitating, yet firm, stammered out that he would be obliged to go out after dinner. He was full of plans, and after pushing on the preparations for a meal, he gobbled down his food, to the great disgust of his host, who was not only a great eater, but a great talker. He refused to wait

for dessert, but, retiring to another room, shut himself in, drew a layman's suit from his portmanteau and put it on.

When he appeared again, his friend saw that he was dressed in a long, severe, black frock-coat, which seemed to have the drollery of a disguise. With his head crowned by a rusty opera-hat of prodigious height, he hastily gulped down his coffee, mumbled a grace and slipped out. Leaning over the stair-rail, Abbé Le Génil shouted to him:

"Don't ring when you come in, or you'll wake Nanette. You'll find the key under the mat. One moment, Guitrel, I know where you're going. You old Quintilian, you, you're just going to take an elocution lesson."

Through the damp fog, Abbé Guitrel followed the quays along by the river, passed the bridge of Saint-Pères, crossed the Place du Carrousel, unnoticed by the indifferent passers-by, who scarcely took the trouble even to glance at his huge hat. Finally he halted under the Tuscan porch of the Comédie-Française. He carefully read the playbill in order to make sure that the arrangements had not been changed, and that *Andromaque* and the *Malade Imaginaire* would be presented. Then he asked at the second pay-box for a pit ticket.

The narrow seats behind the empty stalls were already almost filled when he sat down and opened

an old newspaper, not to read, but to keep himself in countenance, while he listened to the talk going on around him. He had a quick ear, and it was always by the ear that he observed, just as M. Worms-Clavelin listened with his mouth. His neighbours were shop-hands and artists' assistants who had obtained seats through friendship with a scene-shifter or a dresser. It is a little world of simple-minded folk, keenly bent on sight-seeing, very well satisfied with themselves, and busied with bets and bicycles. The younger members are peaceful enough in reality, although they assume a jaunty military air, being automatically democratic and republican, but conservative in their jokes about the President of the Republic. As Abbé Guitrel caught the words that flew hither and thither all round him, words which revealed this frame of mind, he thought of the fancies cherished by Abbé Lantaigne, who still dreamt, in his hermit-like seclusion, of bringing such a class as this back to obedience to monarchy and priestcraft. Behind his paper Abbé Guitrel chuckled at the idea.

"These Parisians," thought he, "are the most adaptable people in the world. To the provincial mind they are quite incomprehensible, but would to God that the republicans and freethinkers of the diocese of Tourcoing were cut out on the same model! But the spirit of Northern France is as

bitter as the wild hops of its plains. And in my diocese I shall find myself placed with violent Socialists on one side and fervid Catholics on the other."

He foresaw the trials that awaited him in the see once held by the blessed Loup, and so far was he from shrinking at the contemplation of them, that he invoked them on himself, with an accompaniment of such loud sighs that his neighbour looked at him to see if he were ill. Thus Abbé Guitrel's head seethed with fancies of his bishopric amid the murmur of frivolous chatter, the banging of doors and the restless movements of the work-girls.

But when at the signal the curtain slowly rose, he instantly became absorbed in the play. It was the delivery and the gestures of the actors on which his attention was riveted. He studied the notes of their voices, their gait, the play of their features, with all the intent interest of an experienced preacher who would fain learn the secret of noble gesture and pathetic intonation. Whenever a long speech echoed through the theatre, he redoubled his attention and only longed to be listening to Corneille, whose speeches are longer, who is more fond of oratorical effects and more skilful in emphasising the separate points of a speech.

At the moment when the actor who played Orestes was reciting the great classic harangue "*Avant que tous les Grecs . . .*" the professor of sacred elocution set himself to store up in his mind every attitude and intonation. Abbé Le Génil knew his old friend well; he was perfectly aware that the crafty preacher was in the habit of going to the theatre to learn the tricks of oratory.

To the actresses M. Guitrel paid far less attention. He held women in contempt, which fact by no means implies that his thoughts had always been chaste. Priest as he was, he had in his time known the promptings of the flesh. Heaven only knows how often he had dodged, evaded or transgressed the seventh commandment! And one had better ask no questions as to the kind of women who also knew this about him. *Si iniquitates observaveris, Domine, Domine quis sustinebit?* But he was a priest, and had the priestly horror of the woman's body. Even the perfume of long hair was abhorrent to him, and when his neighbour, a young shop-assistant, began to extol the beautiful arms of a famous actress, he replied by a contemptuous sneer that was by no means hypocritical.

However, he remained full of interest right up to the final fall of the curtain, as he saw himself in fancy transferring the passion of Orestes, as rendered by an expert interpreter, into some

sermon on the torments of the damned or the miserable end of the sinner. He was troubled by a provincial accent which spoilt his delivery, and between the acts he sat busily trying to correct it in his mind, modelling his correction on what he had just heard. "The voice of a bishop of Tourcoing," thought he, "ought not to savour of the roughness of the cheap wines of our hills of the Midlands."

He was immensely tickled by the play of Molière with which the performance concluded. Incapable of seeing the humorous side of things for himself, he was very pleased when anyone else pointed them out to him. An absurd physical mishap filled him with infinite joy and he laughed heartily at the grosser scenes.

In the middle of the last act he drew a roll of bread from his pocket and swallowed it morsel by morsel, keeping his hand over his mouth as he ate, and watching carefully lest he should be caught in this light repast by the stroke of midnight; for next morning he was to say Mass in the chapel of the Convent of the Seven Wounds.

He returned home after the play by way of the deserted quays, which he crossed with his short, tapping steps. The hollow moan of the river alone filled the silence, as M. Guitrel walked along through the midst of a reddish fog which doubled the size of everything and made his hat look an

absurd height in the dimness. As he stole by, close to the dripping walls of the ancient Hôtel-Dieu, a bare-headed woman came limping forward to meet him. She was a fat, ugly creature, no longer young, and her white chemise barely covered her bosom. Coming abreast of him, she seized the tail of his coat and made proposals to him. Then suddenly, even before he had time to free himself, she rushed away, crying :

"A priest! What ill luck! Plague take it! What misfortune is coming to me?"

M. Guitrel was aware that some ignorant women still cherish the superstition that it is unlucky to meet a priest; but he was surprised that this woman should have recognised his profession even in the dress of a layman.

"That's the penalty of the unfrocked," thought he. "The priest, which still lives in him, will always peep out. *Tu es sacerdos in æternum*, Guitrel."

III

LOWN by the north wind over the hard, white ground along with a whirl of dead leaves, M. Bergeret crossed the Mall between the leafless elms and began to climb Duroc Hill. His footsteps echoed on the uneven pavements as he walked towards the louring, smoky sky which painted a barrier of violet across the horizon ; to the right he left the farrier's forge and the front of a dairy decorated with a picture of two red cows, to the left stretched the long, low walls of market-gardens. He had that morning prepared his tenth and last lesson on the eighth book of the *Æneid*, and now he was mechanically turning over in his mind the points in metre and grammar which had particularly caught his notice. Guiding the rhythm of his thoughts by the beat of his footsteps, at regular intervals he repeated to himself the rhythmic words : *Patrio vocat agmina sistro*. . . . But every now and then his keen, versatile mind flitted away to critical appreciation of a wider range.

The martial rhetoric of this eighth book annoyed him, and it seemed to him absurd that Venus should give Æneas a shield embossed with pictures of the scenes of Roman history up to the battle of Actium and the flight of Cleopatra. *Patrio vocat agmina sistro.* Having reached the cross-roads at the Bergères, which give toward Duroc Hill, he paused for a moment before the wine-coloured front of Maillard's tavern, now damp, deserted and shuttered. Here the thought occurred to him that these Romans, although he had devoted his whole life to the study of them, were, after all, but terrors of pomposity and mediocrity. As he grew older and his taste became more mellowed, there was scarcely one of them that he prized, save Catullus and Petronius. But, after all, it was his business to make the best of the lot to which fate had called him. *Patrio vocat agmina sistro.* Would Virgil and Propertius try to make one believe, said he to himself, that the timbrel, whose shrill sound accompanied the frenzied religious dances of the priests, was also the instrument of the Egyptian soldiers and sailors? It was really incredible.

As he descended the street of the Bergères, on the side opposite Duroc Hill, he suddenly noticed the mildness of the air. Just here the road winds downward between walls of limestone, where the

roots of tiny oak-trees find a difficult foothold. Here M. Bergeret was sheltered from the wind, and in the eye of the December sun which filtered down on him in a half-hearted, rayless fashion, he still murmured, but more softly : *Patrio vocat agmina sistro.* Doubtless Cleopatra had fled from Actium to Egypt, but still it was through the fleet of Octavius and Agrippa which tried to stop her passage.

Allured by the sweetness of air and sun, M. Bergeret sat down by the side of the road, on one of the blocks which had been quarried out of the mountain years ago, and which were now covered with a coating of black moss. Through the delicate tracery of the branches overhead he noticed the lilac hue of the sky, streaked here and there with smoke trails. Thus to plunge in lonely reverie filled his soul with peaceful sadness.

In attacking Agrippa's galleys which blocked their way, he reflected, Antony and Cleopatra had but one object, and that was to clear a passage. It was this precise feat that Cleopatra, who raised the blockade of her sixty ships, succeeded in accomplishing. Seated in the cutting, M. Bergeret enjoyed the harmless elation of settling the fate of the world on the far-famed waves of Acarnania. Then, as he happened to throw a glance three paces in front of him, he caught sight of an old man

who was sitting on a heap of dead leaves on the other side of the road and leaning against the grey wall. It was scarcely possible to distinguish between this wild figure and its surroundings, for his face, his beard and his rags were exactly the colour of the stones and the leaves. He was slowly scraping a piece of wood with an old knife-blade ground thin on the millstone of the years.

"Good-day to you, sir," said the old fellow. "The sun is pretty. And I'll tell you what's more—it isn't going to rain."

M. Bergeret recognised the man: it was Pied d'Alouette, the tramp whom M. Roquincourt, the magistrate, had wrongly implicated in the murder that took place in Queen Marguerite's house and whom he had imprisoned for six months in the vague hope that unforeseen charges would be laid at his door. This he did, either because he thought that the longer the imprisonment continued the more justifiable it would seem, or merely through spite against a simpleton who had misled the officers of the law. M. Bergeret, who always had a fellow-feeling for the oppressed, answered Pied d'Alouette in a kindly style that reflected the old fellow's good-will.

"Good-day, friend," said he. "I see that you know all the pleasant nooks. This hillside is warm and well sheltered."

There was a moment's silence, and then Pied d'Alouette answered :

"I know better spots than this. But they are far away from here. One mustn't be afraid of a walk. Feet are all right. Shoes aren't. I can't wear good shoes because they're strange to my feet. I only rip them up, when they give me sound ones."

And raising his foot from the cushion of dead leaves, he pointed to his big toe sticking out, wrapped in wads of linen, through the slits in the leather of his boot.

Relapsing into silence once more, he began to polish the piece of hard wood.

M. Bergeret soon returned to his own thoughts. *Pallentem morte futura.* Agrippa's galleys could not bar the way to Antony's purple-sailed trireme. This time, at least, the dove escaped the vulture.

But hereupon Pied d'Alouette began again :

"They have taken away my knife!"

"Who have?"

Lifting his arm, the tramp waved it in the direction of the town and gave no other answer. Yet he was following the course of his own slow thought, for presently he said :

"They never gave it back to me."

He sat on in solemn silence, powerless to express the ideas that revolved in his darkened

mind. His knife and his pipe were the only possessions he had in the world. It was with his knife that he cut the lump of hard bread and the bacon rind they gave him at farm-house doors, food which his toothless gums would not bite; it was with his knife that he chopped up cigar-ends to stuff them into his pipe; it was with his knife that he scraped out the rotten bits in fruit and with it he managed to drag out from the dung-heaps things good to eat. It was with his knife that he shaped his walking-sticks and cut down branches to make a bed of leaves for himself in the woods at night. With his knife he carved boats out of oak-bark for the little boys, and dolls out of deal for the little girls. His knife was the tool with which he practised all the arts of life, the most skilled, as well as the most homely, everyday ones. Always famished and often full of ingenuity, he not only supplied his own wants, but also made dainty reed fountains which were much admired in the town.

For, although the man would not work, he was yet a jack of all trades. When he came out of prison nothing would induce them to restore his knife to him; they kept it in the record office. And so he went on tramp once more, but now weaponless, stripped, weaker than a child, wretched wherever he went. He wept over his loss: tiny

tear-drops came, that scorched his bloodshot eyes without overflowing. Then, as he went out of the town, his courage returned, for in the corner of a milestone he came upon an old knife-blade. Now he had cut a strong beechen handle for it in the woods of the Bergères, and was fitting it on with skilful hands.

The idea of his knife suggested his pipe to him. He said :

"They let me keep my pipe."

Drawing from the woollen bag which he wore against his breast, a kind of black, sticky thimble, he showed the bowl of a pipe without the fragment of a stem.

"My poor fellow," said M. Bergeret, "you don't look at all like a great criminal. How do you manage to get put in gaol so often ?"

Pied d'Alouette had not acquired the dialogue habit and he had no notion of how to carry on a conversation. Although he had a kind of deep intelligence, it took him some time to grasp the sense of the words addressed to him. It was practice that he lacked and at first, therefore, he made no attempt to answer M. Bergeret, who sat tracing lines with the point of his stick in the white dust of the road. But at last Pied d'Alouette said :

"I don't do any wrong things. Then I am punished for other things."

At length he seemed able to talk connectedly, with but few breaks.

"Do you mean to say that they put you in prison for doing nothing wrong?"

"I know the people who do the wrong things, but I should do myself harm if I blabbed."

"You herd, then, with vagabonds and evil-doers?"

"You are trying to make me peach. Do you know Judge Roquincourt?"

"I know him a little. He's rather stern, isn't he?"

"Judge Roquinçourt, he is a good talker. I never heard anyone speak so well and so quickly. A body hasn't time to understand him. A body can't answer. There isn't anybody who speaks one half as well."

"He kept you in solitary confinement for long months and yet you bear him no grudge. What a humble example of mercy and long-suffering."

Pied d'Alouette resumed the polishing of his knife-handle. As the work progressed, he became quieter and seemed to recover his peace of mind. Suddenly he demanded:

"Do you know a man called Corbon?"

"Who is he, this Corbon?"

It was too difficult to explain. Pied d'Alouette waved his arm in a vague semicircle that covered

a quarter of the horizon. Yet his mind was busy with the man he had just mentioned, for again he repeated :

" Corbon."

" Pied d'Alouette," said M. Bergeret, " they say you are a queer sort of vagabond and that, even when you are in absolute want, you never steal anything. Yet you live with evil-doers and you are the friend of murderers."

Pied d'Alouette answered :

" There are some who think one thing and others who think another. But if I myself thought of doing wrong, I should dig a hole under a tree on Duroc Hill and bury my knife at the bottom of the hole. Then I should pound down the earth on top of it with my feet. For when people have the notion of doing wrong, it's the knife that leads them on. It's also pride which leads them on. As for me, I lost my pride when I was a lad, for men, women and children in my own parts all made fun of me."

" And have you never had wicked, violent thoughts ? "

" Sometimes, when I came upon women alone on the roads, for the fancy I had for them. But that's all over now."

" And that fancy never comes back to you ? "

" Time and again it does."

"Pied d'Alouette, you love liberty and you are free. You live without toil. I call you a happy man."

"There are some happy folks. But not me."

"Where are these happy folks, then?"

"At the farms."

M. Bergeret rose and slipping a ten-sou piece into Pied d'Alouette's hand, said:

"So you fancy, Pied d'Alouette, that happiness is to be found under a roof, by the chimney-corner, or on a feather-bed. I thought you had more sense."

IV

N New Year's Day M. Bergeret was always in the habit of dressing himself in his black suit the first thing in the morning. Nowadays, it had lost all its gloss and the grey wintry light made it look ashen-colour. The gold medal that hung from M. Bergeret's buttonhole by a violet riband, although it gave him a false air of splendour, testified clearly to the fact that he was no Knight of the Legion of Honour. In fact, in this dress he always felt strangely thin and poverty-stricken. Even his white tie seemed to his fancy a wretchedly paltry affair, for to tell the truth, it was not even a fresh one. At length, after vainly crumpling the front of his shirt, he recognised the fact that it is impossible to make mother-of-pearl buttons stay in buttonholes that have been stretched by long wear : at the thought he became utterly disconsolate, for he recognised the fact sorrowfully that he was no man of the

world. And sitting down on a chair, he fell into a reverie :

"But, after all, does there in truth exist a world populated by men of the world ? For it seems to me, indeed, that what is commonly called the world is but a cloud of gold and silver hung in the blue of heaven. To the man who has actually entered it, it seems but a mist. In fact, social distinctions are matters of much confusion. Men are drawn together in flocks by their common prejudices or their common tastes. But tastes often war against prejudices, and chance sets everything at variance. All the same, a large income and the leisure given by it tend to produce a certain style of life and special habits. This fact is the bond which links society people, and this kinship produces a certain standard which rules manners, physique and sport. Hence we derive the 'tone' of society. This 'tone' is purely superficial and for that very reason fairly perceptible. There are such things as society manners and appearances, but there is no such thing as society human nature, for what truly decides our character is passion, thought and feeling. Within us is a tribunal with which the world has no concern."

Still, the wretched look of his shirt and tie continued to harass him, till at last he went to look

at himself in the sitting-room mirror. Somehow his face assumed a far-off appearance in the glass, quite obscured as it was by an immense basket of heather festooned with ribands of red satin. The basket was of wicker, in the shape of a chariot with gilded wheels, and stood on the piano between two bags of *marrons glacés*. To its gilded shaft was affixed M. Roux's card, for the basket was a present from him to Madame Bergeret.

The professor made no attempt to push aside the beribboned tufts of heather ; he was satisfied with catching a glimpse of his left eye in the glass behind the flowers, and he continued to gaze at it benevolently for some little time. M. Bergeret, firmly convinced as he was that no one loved him, either in this world or in any other, sometimes treated himself to a little sympathy and pity. For he always behaved with the greatest consideration to all unhappy people, himself included. Now, dropping further consideration of his shirt and tie, he murmured to himself :

"You interpret the bosses on the shield of Æneas and yet your own tie is crumpled. You are ridiculous on both counts. You are no man of the world. You should teach yourself, then, at least, how to live the inner life and should cultivate within yourself a wealthy kingdom."

On New Year's Day he had always grounds for

bewailing his destiny, before he set out to pay his respects to two vulgar, offensive fellows, for such were the rector and the dean. The rector, M. Leterrier, could not bear him. This feeling was a natural antipathy that grew as regularly as a plant and brought forth fruit every year. M. Leterrier, a professor of philosophy and the author of a text-book which summed up all systems of thought, had the blind dogmatic instincts of the official teacher. No doubt whatever remained in his mind touching the questions of the good, the beautiful and the true, the characteristics of which he had summarised in one chapter of his work (pages 216 to 262). Now he regarded M. Bergeret as a dangerous and misguided man, and M. Bergeret, in his turn, fully appreciated the perfect sincerity of the dislike he aroused in M. Leterrier. Nor, in fact, did he make any complaint against it; sometimes he even treated it with an indulgent smile. On the other hand, he felt abjectly miserable whenever he met the dean, M. Torquet, who never had an idea in his head, and who, although he was crammed with learning, still retained the brain of a positive ignoramus. He was a fat man with a low forehead and no cranium to speak of, who did nothing all day but count the knobs of sugar in his house and the pears in his garden, and who would go on hanging

bells, even when one of his professional colleagues paid him a visit. In doing mischief he showed an activity and a something approaching intelligence which filled M. Bergeret with amazement. Such thoughts as these were in the professor's mind, as he put on his overcoat to go and wish M. Torquet a happy New Year.

Yet he took a certain pleasure in being out of doors, for in the street he could enjoy that most priceless blessing, the liberty of the mind. In front of the Two Satyrs at the corner of the Tintelleries, he paused for a moment to give a friendly glance at the little acacia which stretched its bare branches over the wall of Lafolie's garden.

"Trees in winter," thought he, "take on an aspect of homely beauty that they never show in all the pomp of foliage and flowers. It is in winter that they reveal their delicate structure, that they show their charming framework of black coral: these are no skeletons, but a multitude of pretty little limbs in which life slumbers. If I were a landscape-painter . . ."

As he stood wrapt in these reflections, a portly man called him by name, seized his arm and walked on with him. This was M. Compagnon, the most popular of all the professors, the idolised master who gave his mathematical lectures in the great amphitheatre.

"Hullo! my dear Bergeret, happy New Year. I bet you're going to call on the dean. So am I. We'll walk on together."

"Gladly," answered M. Bergeret, "since in that way I shall travel pleasantly towards a painful goal. For I must confess it is no pleasure to me to see M. Torquet."

On hearing this uncalled-for confidence, M. Compagnon, whether instinctively or inadvertently it was hard to say, withdrew the hand which he had slipped under his colleague's arm.

"Yes, yes, I know! You and the dean don't get on very well. Yet in general he isn't a man who is difficult to get on with."

"In speaking to you as I have done," answered M. Bergeret, "I was not even thinking of the hostility which, according to report, the dean persists in keeping up towards me. But it chills me to the very marrow whenever I come in contact with a man who is totally lacking in imagination of any kind. What really saddens is not the idea of injustice and hatred, nor is it the sight of human misery. Quite the contrary, in fact, for we find the misfortunes of our fellows quite laughable, if only they are shown to us from a humorous standpoint. But those gloomy souls on whom the outer world seems to make no impression, those beings who have the faculty of ignoring the entire universe—

the very sight of them reduces me to distress and desperation. My intercourse with M. Torquet is really one of the most painful misfortunes of my life."

"Just so!" said M. Compagnon. "Our college is one of the most splendid in France, on account of the high attainments of the lecturers and the convenience of the buildings. It is only the laboratories that still leave something to be desired. But let us hope that this regrettable defect will soon be remedied, thanks to the combined efforts of our devoted rector and of so influential a senator as M. Laprat-Teulet."

"It is also desirable," said M. Bergeret, "that the Latin lectures should cease to be given in a dark, unwholesome cellar."

As they crossed the Place Saint-Exupère, M. Compagnon pointed to Deniseau's house.

"We no longer," said he, "hear any chatter about the prophetess who held communion with Saint Radegonde and several other saints from Paradise. Did you go to see her, Bergeret? I was taken to see her by Lacarelle, the *préfet's* chief secretary, just at the time when she was at the height of her popularity. She was sitting with her eyes shut in an arm-chair, while a dozen of the faithful plied her with questions. They asked her if the Pope's health was satisfactory, what

would be the result of the Franco-Russian alliance, whether the income-tax bill would pass, and whether a remedy for consumption would soon be found. She answered every question poetically and with a certain ease. When my turn came, I asked her this simple question :

" 'What is the logarithm of 9' ? Well, Bergeret, do you imagine that she said 0,954 ?"

" No, I don't," said M. Bergeret.

" She never answered a word," continued M. Compagnon ; " never a word. She remained quite silent. Then I said : 'How is it that Saint Radegonde doesn't know the logarithm of 9 ? It is incredible !' There were present at the meeting a few retired colonels, some priests, old ladies and a few Russian doctors. They seemed thunderstruck and Lacarelle's face grew as long as a fiddle. I took to my heels amid a torrent of reproaches."

As M. Compagnon and M. Bergeret were crossing the square chatting in this way, they came upon M. Roux, who was going through the town scattering visiting-cards right and left, for he went into society a good deal.

" Here is my best pupil," said M. Bergeret.

" He looks a sturdy fellow," said M. Compagnon, who thought a great deal of physical strength. " Why the deuce does he take Latin ?"

M. Bergeret was much piqued by this question and inquired whether the mathematical professor was of opinion that the study of the classics ought to be confined exclusively to the lame, the halt, the maimed and the blind.

But already M. Roux was bowing to the two professors with a flashing smile that showed his strong, white teeth. He was in capital spirits, for his happy temperament, which had enabled him to master the secret of the soldier's life, had just brought him a fresh stroke of good luck. Only that morning M. Roux had been granted a fortnight's leave that he might recover from a slight injury to the knee that was practically painless.

"Happy man!" cried M. Bergeret. "He needn't even tell a lie to reap all the benefits of deceit." Then, turning towards M. Compagnon, he remarked: "In my pupil, M. Roux, lie all the hopes of Latin verse. But, by a strange anomaly, although this young scholar scans the lines of Horace and Catullus with the utmost severity, he himself composes French verses that he never troubles to scan, verses whose irregular metre I must confess I cannot grasp. In a word, M. Roux writes *vers libres*."

"Really," said M. Compagnon politely.

M. Bergeret, who loved acquiring information

and looked indulgently on new ideas, begged M. Roux to recite his last poem, *The Metamorphosis of the Nymph*, which had not yet been given to the world.

"One moment," said M. Compagnon. "I will walk on your left, Monsieur Roux, so that I may have my best ear towards you."

It was settled that M. Roux should recite his poem while he walked with the two professors as far as the dean's house on the Tournelles, for on such a gentle slope as that he would not lose his breath.

Then M. Roux began to declaim *The Metamorphosis of the Nymph* in a slow, drawling, sing-song voice. In lines punctuated here and there by the rumbling of cart-wheels he recited :

The snow-white nymph,
Who glides with rounded hips
Along the winding shore,
And the isle where willows grey
Girdle her waist with the belt of Eve,
In leafage of oval shape,
And palely disappears.[1]

[1] La nymphe blanche
Qui coule à pleines hanches,
Le long du rivage arrondi
Et de l'île où les saules grisâtres
Mettent à ses flancs la ceinture d'Ève,
En feuillages ovales,
Et qui fuit pâle.

Then he painted a shifting kaleidoscope of :

Green banks shelving down,
With the hostel of the town
And the frying of gudgeons within.[1]

Restless, unquiet, the nymph takes to flight.

She draws near the town and there the metamorphosis takes place.

Fretted are her hips by the rough stone of the quay,
Her breast is a thicket of rugged hair
And black with the coal, which mingled with sweat,
Has turned the nymph to a stevedore wet.
And below is the dock
For the coke.[2]

Next the poet sang of the river flowing through the city :

And the river, from henceforth municipal and historic,
And worthy of archives, of annals and records,
Worthy of glory.
Deriving something solemn and even stern
From the grey stone walls,
Flows under the heavy shadow of the basilica
Where linger still the shades of Eudes, of Adalberts,
In the golden fringes of the past,

[1] De vertes berges,
Avec l'auberge
Et les fritures de goujons.

[2] La pierre du quai dur lui rabote les hanches,
Sa poitrine est hérissée d'un poil rude,
Et noire de charbons, que délaye la sueur,
La nymphe est devenue un débardeur.
Et là-bas est le dock
Pour le coke.

Bishops who bless not the nameless dead,
The nameless dead,
No longer bodies, but leather bottèls,
Who will to go hence,
Along the isles in the form of boats
With, for masts, but the chimney-tops.
For the drownèd will out beyond.
But pause you on the erudite parapets
Where, in boxes, lies many a fable strange,
And the red-edged conjuring book whereon the plane-tree
Sheds its leaves,
Perchance there you'll discover potent words:
For you're no stranger to the value of runes
Nor to the true power of signs traced on the sheets."[1]

[1] Et le fleuve, d'ores en avant municipal et historique,
Et dignement d'archives, d'annales, de fastes,
De gloire.
Prenant du sérieux et même du morose
De pierre grise,
Se traîne sous la lourde ombre basilicale
Que hantent encore des Eudes, des Adalberts,
Dans les orfrois passés,
Évêques qui ne bénissent pas les noyés anonymes,
Anonymes,
Non plus des corps, mais des outres,
Qui vont outre,
Le long des îles en forme de bateaux plats
Avec, pour mâtures, des tuyaux de cheminées.
Et les noyés vont outre.
Mais arrête-toi aux parapets doctes
Où, dans les boîtes, gît mainte anecdote,
Et le grimoire à tranches rouges sur lequel le platane
Fait pleuvoir ses feuilles,
Il se peut que, là, tu découvres une bonne écriture :
Car tu n'ignores pas la vertu des runes
Ni le pouvoir des signes tracés sur les lames.

For a long, long while M. Roux traced the course of this marvellous river, nor did he finish his recital till they reached the dean's doorstep.

"That's very good," said M. Compagnon, for he had no grudge against literature, though for want of practice he could barely distinguish between a line of Racine and a line of Mallarmé.

But M. Bergeret said to himself:

"Perhaps, after all, this is a masterpiece?"

And, for fear of wronging beauty in disguise, he silently pressed the poet's hand.

V

S he came out of the dean's house, M. Bergeret met Madame de Gromance returning from Mass. This gave him great pleasure, for he always considered that the sight of a pretty woman is a stroke of good luck when it comes in the way of an honest man, and in his eyes Madame de Gromance was a most charming woman. She alone, of all the women in the town, knew how to dress herself with the skilful art that conceals art: and he was grateful to her for this, as well as for her carriage that displayed the lissom figure and the supple hips, mere hints though they were of a beauty veiled from the sight of the humble, poverty-stricken scholar, but which could yet serve him as an apposite illustration of some line of Horace, Ovid or Martial. His heart went out towards her for her sweetness and the amorous atmosphere that floated round her. In his mind he thanked her for that heart of hers that yielded so easily; he felt it as a personal

favour, although he had no hope at all of ever sunning himself in the light of her smile. Stranger as he was in aristocratic circles, he had never been in the lady's house, and it was merely by a stroke of extraordinary luck that someone introduced him to her in M. de Terremondre's box, after the procession at the Jeanne d'Arc celebrations. Moreover, being a wise man with a sense of the becoming, he did not even hope for closer acquaintance. It was enough for him to catch a chance glimpse of her fair face as he passed in the street, and to remember, whenever he saw her, the tales they told about her in Paillot's shop. Thus he owed some pleasant moments to her and accordingly felt a sort of gratitude towards her.

This New Year's morning he caught sight of her in the porch of Saint-Exupère, as she stood lifting her petticoat with one hand so as to emphasise the pliant bending of the knee, while with the other she held a great prayer-book bound in red morocco. As he gazed, he offered up a mental hymn of thanksgiving to her for thus acting as a charming fairy-tale, a source of subtle pleasure to all the town. This idea he tried to throw into his smile as he passed.

Madame de Gromance's notion of ideal womanhood was not quite the same as M. Bergeret's.

Hers was mingled with many society interests, and being of the world, she had a keen eye to worldly affairs. She was by no means ignorant of the reputation she enjoyed in the town, and hence, whenever she had no special desire to stand in anyone's good graces, she treated him with cold hauteur. Among such persons she classed M. Bergeret, whose smile seemed merely impertinent. She replied to it, therefore, by a supercilious look which made him blush. As he continued his walk, he said to himself penitently :

" She has been a minx. But on my side, I have just made an ass of myself. I see that now ; and now that it's too late, I also see that my smile, which said ' You are the joy of all the town,' must have seemed an impertinence. This delicious being is no philosopher emancipated from common prejudices. Of course, she would not understand me : it would be impossible for her to see that I consider her beauty one of the prime forces of the world, and regard the use she makes of it only as a splendid sovereignty. I have been tactless and I am ashamed of it. Like all honourable people, I have sometimes transgressed a human law and yet have felt no repentance for it whatever. But certain other acts of my life, which were merely opposed to those subtle and lofty niceties that we call the conventions, have often filled me

with sharp regret and even with a kind of remorse. At this moment I want to hide myself for very shame. Henceforth I shall flee whenever I see the charming vision of this lady of the supple figure, *crispum . . . docta movere latus.* I have, indeed, begun the year badly!"

"A happy New Year to you," said a voice that emerged from a beard beneath a straw hat.

It belonged to M. Mazure, the archivist to the department. Ever since the Ministry had refused him academic honours on the ground that he had no claim, and since all classes in the town steadily refused to return Madame Mazure's calls, because she had been both cook and mistress to the two officials previously in charge of the archives, M. Mazure had been seized with a horror of all government and become disgusted with society. He lived now the life of a gloomy misanthrope.

This being a day when friendly or, at any rate, courteous visits are customary, he had put on a shabby knitted scarf, the bluish wool of which showed under his overcoat decorated with torn buttonholes: this he did to show his scorn of the human race. He had also donned a broken straw hat that his good wife, Marguerite, used to stick on a cherry tree in the garden when the cherries were ripe. He cast a pitying glance at M. Bergeret's white tie.

"You have just bowed," said he, "to a pretty hussy."

It pained M. Bergeret to have to listen to such harsh and unphilosophic language. But as he could forgive a good deal to a nature warped by misanthropy, it was with gentleness that he set about reproving M. Mazure for the coarseness of his speech.

"My dear Mazure," said he, "I expected from your wide experience a juster estimate of a lady who harms no one."

M. Mazure answered drily that he objected to light women. From him it was by no means a sincere expression of opinion, for, strictly speaking, M. Mazure had no moral code. But he persisted in his bad temper.

"Come now," said M. Bergeret with a smile, "I'll tell you what is wrong with Madame de Gromance. She was born just a hundred and fifty years too late. In eighteenth-century society no man of brains would have disapproved of her."

M. Mazure began to relent under this flattery. He was no sullen Puritan, but he respected the civil marriage, to which the statesmen of the Revolution had imparted fresh dignity. For all that, he did not deny the claim of the heart and the senses. He acknowledged that the mistress has her place in society as well as the wife.

"And, by the way, how is Madame Bergeret?" he inquired.

As the north wind whistled across the Place Saint-Exupère M. Bergeret watched M. Mazure's nose getting redder and redder under the turned-down brim of the straw hat. His own feet and knees were frozen, and he suffered his thoughts to play round the idea of Madame de Gromance just to get a little warmth and joy into his veins.

Paillot's shop was not open, and the two professors, thus fireless and houseless, stood looking at each other in sad sympathy.

In the depths of his friendly heart M. Bergeret thought to himself:

"As soon as I leave this fellow with his limited, boorish ideas, I shall be once more alone in the desert waste of this hateful town. It will be wretched."

And his feet remained glued to the sharp stones of the square, whilst the wind made his ears burn.

"I will walk back with you as far as your door," said the archivist of the department.

Then they walked on side by side, bowing from time to time to fellow-citizens who hurried along in their Sunday clothes, carrying dolls and bags of sweets.

"This Countess de Gromance," said the archi-

vist, "was a Chapon. There was never but one Chapon heard of—her father, the most arrant skinflint in the province. But I have hunted up the record of the Gromance family, who belong to the lesser nobility of the place. There was a Demoiselle Cécile de Gromance who in 1815 gave birth to a child by a Cossack father. That will make a capital subject for an article in a local paper. I am writing a regular series of them."

M. Mazure spoke the truth: every day, from sunrise to sunset, alone in his dusty garret under the roof of the prefecture, he eagerly ransacked the six hundred and thirty-seven thousand pigeonholes which were there huddled together. His gloomy hatred of his fellow-townsmen drove him to this research, merely in the hope that he would succeed in unearthing some scandalous facts about tho most respected families in the neighbourhood. Amid piles of ancient parchments and papers stamped by the registrars of the last two centuries with the arms of six kings, two emperors and three republics he used to sit, laughing in the midst of the clouds of dust, as he stirred up the evidences, now half eaten up by mice and worms, of bygone crimes and sins long since expiated.

As they followed the windings of the Tintelleries, it was with the tale of these cruel revelations that he continued to entertain M. Bergeret, a man who

always cultivated an attitude of particular indulgence towards our forefathers' faults, and who was inquisitive merely in the matter of their habits and customs. Mazure had, or so he averred, discovered in the archives a certain Terremondre who, being a terrorist and president of a local club of Sans-Culottes in 1793, had changed his Christian names from Nicolas-Eustache to Marat-Peuplier. Instantly Mazure hastened to supply M. Jean de Terremondre, his colleague in the Archæological Society, who had gone over to the monarchical and clerical party, with full information touching this forgotten forbear of his, this Marat-Peuplier Terremondre, who had actually written a hymn to Saint Guillotine. He had also unearthed a great-great-uncle of the diocesan Vicar-General, a Sieur de Goulet, or rather, more precisely, a Goulet-Trocard as he signed himself, who, as an army contractor, was condemned to penal servitude in 1812 for having supplied glandered horseflesh instead of beef. The documents relating to this trial he had published in the most rabid journal in the department. M. Mazure promised still more terrible revelations about the Laprat family, revelations full of cases of incest; about the Courtrai family, with one of its members branded for high treason in 1814; about the Dellion family, whose wealth had been gained by gambling in wheat;

about the Quatrebarbe family, whose ancestors, two stokers, a man and a woman, were hanged by lynch law on a tree on Duroc Hill at the time of the consulate. In fact, as late as 1860, old people were still to be met who remembered having seen in their childhood the branches of an oak from which hung a human form with long, black, floating tresses that used to frighten the horses.

"She remained hanging there for three years," exclaimed the archivist, "and she was own grandmother to Hyacinthe Quatrebarbe, the diocesan architect!"

"It's very singular," said M. Bergeret, "but, of course, one ought to keep that kind of thing to oneself."

But Mazure paid no heed. He longed to publish everything, to bruit everything abroad, in direct opposition to the opinion of M. Worms-Clavelin, the *préfet*, who wisely said: "One ought most carefully to avoid giving occasion to scandal and dissension." He had threatened, in fact, to get the archivist dismissed, if he persisted in revealing old family secrets.

"Ah!" cried Mazure, chuckling in his tangled forest of beard, "it shall be known that in 1815 there was a little Cossack who came into the world through the exertions of a Demoiselle de Gromance."

Only a moment since M. Bergeret had reached his own door, and he still held the handle of the bell.

"What does it matter, after all?" said he. "The poor lady did what she couldn't help doing. She is dead, and the little Cossack also is dead. Let us leave their memory in peace, or if we recall it for a moment, let it be with a kindly thought. What zeal is it that so carries you away, dear Monsieur Mazure?"

"The zeal for justice."

M. Bergeret pulled the bell.

"Good-bye, Mazure," said he; "don't be just, and do be merciful. I wish you a very happy New Year."

M. Bergeret looked through the dirty window of the hall to see if there were any letter or paper in the box; he still took an interest in letters from a distance or in literary reviews. But to-day there were only visiting-cards, which suggested to him nothing more interesting than personalities as shadowy and pale as the cards themselves, and a bill from Mademoiselle Rose, the modiste of the Tintelleries. As his eyes fell on this, the thought suddenly occurred to him that Madame Bergeret was becoming extravagant and that the house was stuffy. He could feel the weight of it on his shoulders, and as he stood in the hall, he seemed

to be bearing on his back the whole flooring of his flat, in addition to the drawing-room piano and that terrible wardrobe that swallowed up his little store of money and yet was always empty. Thus weighted with domestic troubles, M. Bergeret grasped the iron handrail with its ample curves of florid metal-work, and began, with bent head and short breath, to climb the stone steps. These were now blackened, worn, cracked, patched, and ornamented with worn bricks and squalid paving-stones, but once, in the bygone days of their early youth, they had known the tread of fine gentlemen and pretty girls, hurrying to pay rival court to Pauquet, the revenue-tax farmer who had enriched himself by the spoils of a whole province. For it was in the mansion of Pauquet de Sainte-Croix that M. Bergeret lived, now fallen from its glory, despoiled of its splendour and degraded by a plaster top-storey which had taken the place of its graceful gable and majestic roof. Now the building was darkened by tall houses built all round it, on ground where once there were gardens with a thousand statues, ornamental waters and a park, and even on the main courtyard where Pauquet had erected an allegorical monument to his king, who was in the habit of making him disgorge his booty every five or six years, after which he was left for another term to stuff himself again with gold.

This courtyard, which was flanked by a splendid Tuscan portico, had vanished in 1857 when the Rue des Tintelleries was widened. Now Pauquet de Sainte-Croix's mansion was nothing but an ugly tenement-house badly neglected by two old caretakers, Gaubert by name, who despised M. Bergeret for his quietness and had no sense of his true generosity, because it was that of a man of moderate means. Yet whatever M. Raynaud gave they regarded with respect, although he gave little when he was well able to give much : to the Gauberts, his hundred-sou piece was valuable because it came from great wealth.

M. Raynaud, who owned the land near the new railway station, lived on the first storey. Over the doorway of this there was a bas-relief which, as usual, caught M. Bergeret's eye as he passed. It depicted old Silenus on his ass surrounded by a group of nymphs. This was all that remained of the interior decoration of the mansion which, belonging to the reign of Louis XV, had been built at a period when the French style was aiming at the classic, but, lucky in missing its aim, had acquired that note of chastity, stability and noble elegance which one associates more especially with Gabriel's designs. As a matter of fact Pauquet de Sainte-Croix's mansion had actually been designed by a pupil of that great architect. Since then it had been

systematically disfigured. Although, for economy's sake and just to save a little trouble and expense, they had not torn down the little bas-relief of Silenus and the nymphs, they had at any rate painted it, like the rest of the staircase, with a sham decoration of red granite. The tradition of the place would have it that in this Silenus one might see a portrait of Pauquet himself, who was reputed to have been the ugliest man of his time, as well as the most popular with women. M. Bergeret, although no great connoisseur in art, made no such mistake as this, for in the grotesque, yet sublime, figure of the old god he recognised a type well known in the Renaissance, and transmitted from the Greeks and Romans. Yet, whenever he saw this Silenus and his nymphs, his thoughts naturally turned to Pauquet, who had enjoyed all the good things of this world in the very house where he himself lived a life that was not only toilsome, but thankless.

"This financier," he thought as he stood on the landing, "merely sucked money from a king who in turn sucked it from him. This made them quits. It is unwise to brag about the finances of the monarchy, since, in the end, it was the financial deficit that brought about the downfall of the system. But this point is noteworthy, that the king was then the sole owner of all property, both real and

personal, throughout the kingdom. Every house belonged to the king, and in proof of this, the subject who actually enjoyed the possession of it had to place the royal arms on the slab at the back of the hearth. It was therefore as owner, and not in pursuance of his right of taxation, that Louis XIV sent his subjects' plate to the Mint in order to defray the expenses of his wars. He even had the treasures of the churches melted down, and I read lately that he carried off the votive-offerings of Notre-Dame de Liesse in Picardy, among which was found the breast that the Queen of Poland had deposited there in gratitude for her miraculous recovery. Everything then belonged to the king, that is to say, to the state. And yet neither the Socialists, who to-day demand the nationalisation of private property, nor the owners who intend to hold fast their possessions, pay any heed to the fact that this nationalisation would be, in some respects, a return to the ancient custom. It gives one a philosophic pleasure to reflect that the Revolution really was for the benefit of those who had acquired private ownership of national possessions and that the Declaration of the Rights of Man has become the landlords' charter.

"This Pauquet, who used to bring here the prettiest girls from the opera, was no knight of Saint-Louis. To-day he would be commander of

the Legion of Honour and to him the finance ministers would come for their instructions. Then it was money he enjoyed; now it would be honours. For money has become honourable. It is, in fact, the only nobility we possess. We have destroyed all the others to put in their place the most oppressive, the most insolent, and the most powerful of all orders of nobility."

M. Bergeret's reflections were distracted at this point by the sight of a group of men, women, and children coming out of M. Raynaud's flat. He saw that it was a band of poor relations who had come to wish the old man a happy New Year: he fancied he could see them smelling about, under their new hats, for some profit to themselves. He went on up the stairs, for he lived on the third floor, which he delighted to call the third "room," using the seventeenth-century phrase for it. And to explain this ancient term he loved to quote La Fontaine's lines:

Where is the good of life to men of make like you,
To live and read for ever in a poor third room?
Chill winter always finds you in the dress of June,
With for lackey but the shadow that is each man's due.[1]

[1] Que sert à vos pareils de lire incessamment?
Ils sont toujours logés à la troisième chambre,
Vêtus au mois de juin comme au mois de décembre,
Ayant pour tout laquais leur ombre seulement.

Possibly the use he made of this quotation and of this kind of talk was unwise, for it exasperated Madame Bergeret, who was proud of living in a flat in the middle of the town, in a house that was inhabited by people of good position.

"Now for the third 'room,'" said M. Bergeret to himself. Drawing out his watch, he saw that it was eleven o'clock. He had told them not to expect him before noon, as he had intended to spend an hour in Paillot's shop. But there he had found the shutters up : holidays and Sundays were days of misery to him, simply because the bookseller's was closed on those days. To-day he had a feeling of annoyance, because he had not been able to pay his usual call on Paillot.

On reaching the third storey he turned his key noiselessly in the lock and entered the dining-room with his cautious footstep. It was a dismal room, concerning which M. Bergeret had formed no particular opinion, although in Madame Bergeret's eyes it was quite artistic, on account of the brass chandelier which hung above the table, the chairs and sideboard of carved oak with which it was furnished, the mahogany whatnot loaded with little cups, and especially on account of the painted china plates that adorned the wall. On entering this room from the dimly lit hall one had the door of the study on the left, and on the

right the drawing-room door. Whenever M. Bergeret entered the flat he was in the habit of turning to the left into his study, where solitude, books and slippers awaited him. This time, however, for no particular motive or reason, without thinking what he was doing, he went to the right. He turned the handle, opened the door, took one step and found himself in the drawing-room.

He then saw on the sofa two figures linked together in a violent attitude that suggested either endearment or strife, but which was, as a matter of fact, very compromising. Madame Bergeret's head was turned away and could not be seen, but her feelings were plainly expressed in the generous display of her red stockings. M. Roux's face wore that strained, solemn, set, distracted look that cannot be mistaken, although one seldom sees it; it agreed with his disordered array. Then, the appearance of everything changed in less than a second, and now M. Bergeret saw before him two quite different persons from those whom he had surprised; two persons who were much embarrassed and whose looks were strange and even rather comical. He would have fancied himself mistaken had not the first picture engraved itself on his sight with a strength that was only equalled by its suddenness.

VI

BERGERET'S first impulse at this shameful sight was to act violently, like a plain man, even with the ferocity of an animal. Born as he was of a long line of unknown ancestors, amongst whom there were, of course, many cruel and savage souls, heir as he was of those innumerable generations of men, apes, and savage beasts from whom we are all descended, the professor had been endowed, along with the germ of life, with the destructive instinct of the older races. Under this shock these instincts awoke. He thirsted for slaughter and burned to kill M. Roux and Madame Bergeret. But his desire was feeble and evanescent. With the four canine teeth which he carried in his mouth and the nails of the carnivorous beast which armed his fingers, M. Bergeret had inherited the ferocity of the beast, but the original force of this instinct had largely disappeared. He did, it is true, feel a desire to kill M. Roux and Madame Bergeret, but it

was a very feeble one. He felt fierce and cruel, but the sensation was so short-lived and so weak that no act was born of the thought, and even the expression of the idea was so swift that it entirely escaped the notice of the two witnesses who were most concerned in its manifestation. In less than a second M. Bergeret had ceased to be purely instinctive, primitive, and destructive, without, however, ceasing at the same time to be jealous and irritated. On the contrary, his indignation went on increasing. In this new frame of mind his thoughts were no longer simple ; they began to centre round the social problem ; confusedly there seethed in his mind fragments of ancient theologies, bits of the Decalogue, shreds of ethics, Greek, Scotch, German and French maxims, scattered portions of the moral code which, by striking his brain like so many flint stones, set him on fire. He felt patriarchal, the father of a family after the Roman style, an overlord and justiciar. He had the virtuous idea of punishing the guilty. After having wanted to kill Madame Bergeret and M. Roux by mere bloodthirsty instinct, he now wanted to kill them out of regard for justice. He mentally sentenced them to terrible and ignominious punishments. He lavished upon them every ignominy of mediæval custom. This journey across the ages of civilisation was longer than the first. It lasted for two

whole seconds, and during that time the two culprits so discreetly changed their attitude that these changes, though imperceptible, were fundamental, and completely altered the character of their relationship.

Finally, religious and moral ideas becoming completely confounded with one another in his mind, M. Bergeret felt nothing but a sense of misery, while disgust, like a vast wave of dirty water, poured across the flame of his wrath. Three full seconds passed; he was plunged in the depths of irresolution and did nothing. By an obscure, confused instinct which was characteristic of his temperament, from the first moment he had turned his eyes away from the sofa and fixed them on the round table near the door. This was covered with a table-cloth of olive-green cotton on which were printed coloured figures of mediæval knights in imitation of ancient tapestry. During these three interminable seconds M. Bergeret clearly made out a little page-boy who held the helmet of one of the tapestry knights. Suddenly he noticed on the table, among the gilt-edged, red-bound books that Madame Bergeret had placed there as handsome ornaments, the yellow cover of the *University Bulletin* which he had left there the night before. The sight of this magazine instantly suggested to him the act most characteristic of his turn of

mind: putting out his hand, he took up the *Bulletin* and left the drawing-room, which a most unlucky instinct had led him to enter.

Once alone in the dining-room a flood of misery overwhelmed him. He longed for the relief of tears, and was obliged to hold on by the chairs in order to prevent himself from falling. Yet with his pain was mingled a certain bitterness that acted like a caustic and burnt up the tears in his eyes. Only a few seconds ago he had crossed this little dining-room, yet now it seemed that, if ever he had set eyes on it before, it must have been in another life. It must surely have been in some far-off stage of existence, in some earlier incarnation, that he had lived in intimate relations with the small sideboard of carved oak, the mahogany shelves loaded with painted cups, the china plates on the wall, that he had sat at this round table between his wife and daughters. It was not his happiness that was dead, for he had never been happy; it was his poor little home life, his domestic relations that were gone. These had always been chilly and unpleasant, but now they were degraded and destroyed; they no longer even existed.

When Euphémie came in to lay the cloth he trembled at the sight of her; she seemed one of the ghosts of the vanished world in which he had once lived.

Shutting himself up in his study, he sat down at his table, and opening the *University Bulletin* quite at random, leant his head deliberately between his hands and, through sheer force of habit, began to read.

He read :

"*Notes on the purity of language.*—Languages are like nothing so much as ancient forests in which words have pushed a way for themselves, as chance or opportunity has willed. Among them we find some weird and even monstrous forms, yet, when linked together in speech, they compose into splendid harmonies, and it would be a barbarous act to prune them as one trims the lime-trees on the public roads. One must tread with reverence on what, in the grand style, is termed *the boundless peaks*. . . ."

"And my daughters!" thought M. Bergeret. "She ought to have thought of them. She ought to have thought of our daughters. . . ."

He went on reading without comprehending a word :

"Of course, such a word as this is a mere abortion. We say *le lendemain*, that is to say, *le le en demain*, when, evidently, what we ought to say is *l'en demain ;* we say *le lierre* for *l'ierre*, which alone is correct. The foundations of language were laid by the people. Everywhere in it we find ignorance,

error, whim; in its simplicity lies its greatest beauty. It is the work of ignorant minds, to whom everything save nature is a sealed book. It comes to us from afar, and those who have handed it down to us were by no means grammarians after the style of Noël and Chapsal."

Then he thought:

"At her age, in her humble, struggling position. . . . I can understand that a beautiful, idle, much idolised woman . . . but she!"

Yet, as he was a reader by instinct, he still went on reading:

"Let us treat it as a precious inheritance, but, at the same time, let us never look too closely into it. In speaking, and even in writing, it is a mistake to trouble too much about etymology. . . ."

"And he, my favourite pupil, whom I have invited to my house . . . ought he not? . . ."

"Etymology teaches us that God is *He Who shines*, and that the *soul* is a *breath*, but into these old words men have read meanings which they did not at first possess."

"Adultery!"

This word came to his lips with such force that he seemed to feel it in his mouth like a coin, like a thin medal. Adultery! . . .

Suddenly he saw a picture of all that this word implied, its associations—commonplace, domestic,

absurd, clumsily tragic, sordidly comic, ridiculous, uncouth ; even in his misery he chuckled.

Being well read in Rabelais, La Fontaine, and Molière, he called himself by the downright, outspoken name that he knew beyond the shadow of a doubt was fitted to his case. But that stopped his laugh, if it could be truthfully said that he had laughed.

"Of course," said he to himself, "it is a petty, commonplace incident in reality. But I am myself suitably proportioned to it, being but an unimportant item in the social structure. It seems, therefore, an important thing to me, and I ought to feel no shame at the misery it brings me."

Following up this thought, he drew his grief round him like a cloak, and wrapped himself in it. Like a sick man full of pity for himself, he pursued the painful visions and the haunting ideas which swarmed endlessly in his burning head. What he had seen caused him physical pain ; noticing this fact, he instantly set himself to find the cause of it, for he was always ruled by the philosophical bent of his temperament.

"The objects," thought he, "which are associdate with the most powerful desires of the flesh cannot be regarded with indifference, for when they do not give delight, they cause disgust. It is not in herself that Madame Bergeret possesses the

power of putting me between these two alternatives ; it is as a symbol of that Venus who is the joy of gods and men. For to me, although she may indeed be one of the least lovable and least mysterious of these symbols of Venus, yet at the same time she must needs be one of the most characteristic and vivid. And the sight of her linked in community of act and feeling with my pupil, M. Roux, reduced her instantly to that elementary type-form which, as I said, must either inspire attraction or repulsion. Thus we may see that every sexual symbol either satisfies or disappoints desire, and for that reason attracts or repels our gaze with equal force, according to the physiological condition of the spectators, and sometimes even according to the successive moods of the same witness.

"This observation brings one to the true reason for the fact that, in all nations and at all periods, sexual rites have been performed in secret, in order that they might not produce violent and conflicting emotions in the spectators. At length it became customary to conceal everything that might suggest these rites. Thus was born Modesty, which governs all men, but particularly the more lascivious nations."

Then M. Bergeret reflected :

"Accident has enabled me to discover the origin of this virtue which varies most of all, merely

because it is the most universal, this Modesty, which the Greeks call Shame. Very absurd prejudices have become connected with this habit which arises from an attitude of mind peculiar to man and common to all men, and these prejudices have obscured its true character. But I am now in a position to formulate the true theory of Modesty. It was at a smaller cost to himself that Newton discovered the laws of gravitation under a tree."

Thus meditated M. Bergeret from the depths of his arm-chair. But his thoughts were still so little under control that he rolled his bloodshot eyes, gnashed his teeth and clenched his fists, until he drove his nails into his palms. Painted with merciless accuracy on his inner eye was the picture of his pupil, M. Roux, in a condition which ought never to be seen by a spectator, for reasons which the professor had first accurately deduced. M. Bergeret possessed a measure of that faculty which we call visual memory. Without possessing the rich power of vision of the painter, who stores numberless vast pictures in a single fold of his brain, he could yet recall, accurately and easily enough, sights seen long ago which had caught his attention. Thus there lived in the album of his memory the outline of a beautiful tree, of a graceful woman, when once these had been impressed on the retina of his eye. But never had any mental

impression appeared to him as clear, as exact, as vividly, accurately and powerfully coloured, as full, compact, solid and masterful, as there appeared to him at this moment the daring picture of his pupil, M. Roux, in the act of embracing Madame Bergeret. This accurate reproduction of reality was hateful; it was also false, inasmuch as it indefinitely prolonged an action which must necessarily be a fleeting one. The perfect illusion which it produced showed up the two characters with obstinate cynicism and unbearable permanence. Again M. Bergeret longed to kill his pupil, M. Roux. He made a movement as if to kill; the idea of murder that his brain formulated had the force of a deed and left him overwhelmed.

Then came a moment of reflection and slowly, quietly he strayed away into a labyrinth of irresolution and contradiction. His ideas flowed together and intermingled, losing their distinctive tints like specks of paint in a glass of water. Soon he even failed to grasp the actual event that had happened.

He cast miserable looks around him, examined the flowers on the wall-paper and noticed that there were badly-joined bunches, so that the halves of the red carnations never met. He looked at the books stacked on the deal shelves. He looked at the little silk and crochet pin-cushion that Madame Bergeret had made and given him some years

before on his birthday. Then he softened at the thought of the destruction of their home life. He had never been deeply in love with this woman, whom he had married on the advice of friends, for he had always found a difficulty in settling his own affairs. Although he no longer loved her at all, she still made up a large part of his life. He thought of his daughters, now staying with their aunt at Arcachon, especially of his favourite Pauline, the eldest, who resembled him. At this he shed tears.

Suddenly through his tears he caught sight of the wicker-work woman on which Madame Bergeret draped her dresses and which she always kept in her husband's study in front of the book-case, disregarding the professor's resentment when he complained that every time he wanted to put his books on the shelves, he had to embrace the wicker-work woman and carry her off. At the best of times M. Bergeret's teeth were set on edge by this contrivance which reminded him of the hen-coops of the cottagers, or of the idol of woven cane which he had seen as a child in one of the prints of his ancient history, and in which, it was said, the Phœnicians burnt their slaves. Above all, the thing reminded him of Madame Bergeret, and although it was headless, he always expected to hear it burst out screaming, moaning, or scolding.

This time the headless thing seemed to be none other than Madame Bergeret herself, Madame Bergeret, the hateful, the grotesque. Flinging himself upon it, he clasped the thing in his arms and made its wicker breast crack under his fingers, as though it were the gristles of ribs that broke. Overturning it, he stamped on it with his feet and carrying it off, threw it creaking and mutilated, out of window into the yard belonging to Lenfant, the cooper, where it fell among buckets and tubs. In doing this, he felt as though he were performing an act that symbolised a true fact, yet was at the same time ridiculous and absurd. On the whole, however, he felt somewhat relieved, and when Euphémie came to tell him that déjeuner was getting cold, he shrugged his shoulders, and walking resolutely across the still deserted dining-room, took up his hat in the hall and went downstairs.

In the gateway he remembered that he knew neither where to go nor what to do and that he had come to no decision at all. Once outside, he noticed that it was raining and that he had no umbrella. He was rather annoyed at the fact, though the sense of annoyance came quite as a relief. As he stood hesitating as to whether he should go out into the shower or not, he caught sight of a pencil drawing on the plaster of the wall, just below the bell and just at the height which a child's arm

would reach. It represented an old man; two dots and two lines within a circle made the face, and the body was depicted by an oval; the arms and legs were shown by single lines which radiated outwards like wheel-spokes and imparted a certain air of jollity to this scrawl, which was executed in the classic style of mural ribaldry. It must have been drawn some time ago, for it showed signs of friction and in places was already half rubbed out. But this was the first time that M. Bergeret had noticed it, doubtless because his powers of observation were just now in a peculiarly wide-awake condition.

"A *graffito*," said the professor to himself.

He noticed next that two horns stuck out from the old man's head and that the word *Bergeret* was written by the side, so that no mistake might be made.

"It is a matter of common talk, then," said he, when he saw this name. "Little rascals on their way to school proclaim it on the walls and I am the talk of the town. This woman has probably been deceiving me for a long time, and with all sorts of men. This mere scrawl tells me more of the truth than I could have gained by a prolonged and searching investigation."

And standing in the rain, with his feet in the mud, he made a closer examination of the

graffito; he noticed that the letters of the inscription were badly written and that the lines of the drawing corresponded with the slope of the writing.

As he went away in the falling rain, he remembered the *graffiti* once traced by clumsy hands on the walls of Pompeii and now uncovered, collected and expounded by philologists. He recalled the clumsy furtive character of the Palatine *graffito* scratched by an idle soldier on the wall of the guard-house.

"It is now eighteen hundred years since that Roman soldier drew a caricature of his comrade Alexandros in the act of worshipping an ass's head stuck on a cross. No monument of antiquity has been more carefully studied than this Palatine *graffito:* it is reproduced in numberless collections. Now, following the example of Alexandros, I, too, have a *graffito* of my own. If to-morrow an earthquake were to swallow up this dismal, accursed town, and preserve it intact for the scientists of the thirtieth century, and if in that far distant future my *graffito* were to be discovered, I wonder what these learned men would say about it. Would they understand its vulgar symbolism? Or would they even be able to spell out my name written in the letters of a lost alphabet?"

With a fine rain falling through the dreary dimness, M. Bergeret finally reached the Place Saint-

Exupère. Between the two buttresses of the church he could see the stall which bore a red boot as a sign. At the sight, he suddenly remembered that his shoes, being worn out by long service, were soaked with water; now, too, he remembered that henceforth he must look after his own clothes, although hitherto he had always left them to Madame Bergeret. With this thought in his mind, he went straight into the cobbler's booth. He found the man hammering nails into the sole of a shoe.

"Good-day, Piedagnel!"

"Good-day, Monsieur Bergeret! What can I do for you, Monsieur Bergeret?"

So saying, the fellow, turning his angular face towards his customer, showed his toothless gums in a smile. His thin face, which ended in a projecting chin and was furrowed by the dark chasm of his eyes, shared the stern, poverty-stricken air, the yellow tint, the wretched aspect of the stone figures carved over the door of the ancient church under whose shadow he had been born, had lived, and would die.

"All right, Monsieur Bergeret, I have your size and I know that you like your shoes an easy fit. You are quite in the right, Monsieur Bergeret, not to try to pinch your feet."

"But I have a rather high instep and the sole of

my foot is arched," protested M. Bergeret. "Be sure you remember that."

M. Bergeret was by no means vain of his foot, but it had so happened one day that in his reading he came upon a passage describing how M. de Lamartine once showed his bare foot with pride, that its high curve, which rested on the ground like the arch of a bridge, might be admired. This story made M. Bergeret feel that he was quite justified in deriving pleasure from the fact that he was not flat-footed. Now, sinking into a wicker chair decorated with an old square of Aubusson carpet, he looked at the cobbler and his booth. On the wall, which was whitewashed and covered with deep cracks, a sprig of box had been placed behind the arms of a black, wooden cross. A little copper figure of Christ nailed to this cross inclined its head over the cobbler, who sat glued to his stool behind the counter, which was heaped with pieces of cut leather and with the wooden models which all bore leather shields to mark the places where the feet that the models represented were afflicted with painful excrescences. A small cast-iron stove was heated white-hot and a strong smell of leather and cookery combined was perceptible.

"I am glad," said M. Bergeret, "to see that you have as much work as you can wish for."

In answer to this remark, the man began to give vent to a string of vague, rambling complaints which yet had an element of truth in them. Things were not as they used to be in days gone by. Nowadays, nobody could stand out against factory competition. Customers just bought ready-made shoes, in stores exactly like the Paris ones.

"My customers die, too," added he. "I have just lost the curé, M. Rieu. There is nothing left but the re-soling business and there isn't much profit in that."

The sight of this ancient cobbler groaning under his own little crucifix filled M. Bergeret with sadness. He asked, rather hesitatingly :

"Your son must be quite twenty by now. What has become of him ?"

"Firmin ? I expect you know," said the man, "that he left the seminary because he had no vocation. But the gentlemen there were kind enough to interest themselves in him, after they had expelled him. Abbé Lantaigne found a place for him as tutor at a Marquis's house in Poitou. But Firmin refused it just out of spite. He is in Paris now, teaching at an institution in the Rue Saint-Jacques, but he doesn't earn much." And the cobbler added sadly :

"What I want . . ."

He stopped and then began again.

"I have been a widower for twelve years. What I want is a wife, because it needs a woman to manage a house."

Relapsing into silence, he drove three nails into the leather of the sole and added :

"Only I must have a steady woman."

He returned to his task. Then suddenly raising his worn and sorrowful face towards the foggy sky, he muttered :

"And besides, it is so sad to be alone ! "

M. Bergeret felt pleased, for he had just caught sight of Paillot standing on the threshold of his shop. He got up to leave :

"Good-day, Piedagnel ! " said he. "Mind and keep the instep high enough ! "

But the cobbler would not let him go, asking with an imploring glance whether he did not know of any woman who would suit him. She must be middle-aged, a good worker, and a widow who would be willing to marry a widower with a small business.

M. Bergeret stood looking in astonishment at this man who actually wanted to get married ; Piedagnel went on meditating aloud :

"Of course," said he, "there's the woman who delivers bread on the Tintelleries. But she likes a drop. Then there's the late curé of Sainte-Agnès's

servant, but she is too haughty, because she has saved a little."

"Piedagnel," said M. Bergeret, "go on re-soling the townsfolks' shoes, remain as you are, alone and contented in the seclusion of your shop. Don't marry again, for that would be a mistake."

Closing the glazed door behind him, he crossed the Place Saint-Exupère and entered Paillot's shop.

The shop was deserted, save for the bookseller himself. Paillot's mind was a barren and illiterate one; he spoke but little and thought of nothing but his business and his country-house on Duroc Hill. Notwithstanding these facts, M. Bergeret had an inexplicable fondness both for the bookseller and for his shop. At Paillot's he felt quite at ease and there ideas came on him in a flood.

Paillot was rich, and never had any complaints to make. Yet he invariably told M. Bergeret that one no longer made the profit on educational books that was once customary, for the practice of allowing discount left but little margin. Besides, the supplying of schools had become a veritable puzzle on account of the changes that were always being made in the curricula.

"Once," said he, "they were much more conservative."

"I don't believe it," replied M. Bergeret. "The fabric of our classical instruction is constantly in

course of repair. It is an old monument which embodies in its structure the characteristics of every period. One sees in it a pediment in the Empire style on a Jesuit portico ; it has rusticated galleries, colonnades like those of the Louvre, Renaissance staircases, Gothic halls, and a Roman crypt. If one were to expose the foundations, one would come upon *opus spicatum*[1] and Roman cement. On each of these parts one might place an inscription commemorating its origin : 'The Imperial University of 1808—Rollin—The Oratorians—Port-Royal—The Jesuits—The Humanists of the Renaissance—The Schoolmen—The Latin Rhetoricians of Autun and Bordeaux.' Every generation has made some change in this palace of wisdom, or has added something to it."

M. Paillot rubbed the red beard that hung from his huge chin and looked stupidly at M. Bergeret. Finally he fled panic-stricken and took refuge behind his counter. But M. Bergeret followed up his argument to its logical conclusion :

"It is thanks to these successive additions that the house is still standing. It would soon crumble to pieces if nothing were ever changed in it. It is only right to repair the parts that threaten to fall in ruin and to add some halls in the new style. But I can hear some ominous cracking in the structure."

[1] Brickwork laid in the shape of ears of corn.

As honest Paillot carefully refrained from making any answer to this occult and terrifying talk, M. Bergeret plunged silently into the corner where the old books stood.

To-day, as always, he took up the thirty-eighth volume of *l'Histoire Générale des Voyages*. To-day, as always, the book opened of its own accord at page 212. Now on this page he saw the picture of M. Roux and Madame Bergeret embracing. . . . Now he re-read the passage he knew so well, without paying any heed to what he read, but merely continuing to think the thoughts that were suggested by the present state of his affairs :

"'a passage to the North. It is to this check,' said he (I know that this affair is by no means an unprecedented one, and that it ought not to astonish the mind of a philosopher), 'that we owe the opportunity of being able to visit the Sandwich Islands again' (It is a domestic event that turns my house upside down. I have no longer a home), 'and to enrich our voyage with a discovery (I have no home, no home any more) which, although the last (I am morally free though, and that is a great point), seems in many respects to be the most important that Europeans have yet made in the whole expanse of the Pacific Ocean. . . .'"

M. Bergeret closed the book. He had caught a glimpse of liberty, deliverance, and a new life. It

was only a glimmer in the darkness, but bright and steady before him. How was he to escape from this dark tunnel? That he could not tell, but at any rate he perceived at the end of it a tiny white point of light. And if he still carried about with him a vision of Madame Bergeret embraced by M. Roux, it was to him but an indecorous sight which aroused in him neither anger nor disgust—just a vignette, the Belgian frontispiece of some lewd book. He drew out his watch and saw that it was now two o'clock. It had taken him exactly ninety minutes to arrive at this wise conclusion.

VII

FTER M. Bergeret had taken the *University Bulletin* from the table and gone out of the room without saying a word, M. Roux and Madame Bergeret together emitted a long sigh of relief.

"He saw nothing," whispered M. Roux, trying to make light of the affair.

But Madame Bergeret shook her head with an expression of anxious doubt. For her part, what she wanted was to throw on her partner's shoulders the whole responsibility for any consequences that might ensue. She felt uneasy and, above all, thwarted. She was also a prey to a certain feeling of shame at having allowed herself, like a fool, to be surprised by a creature who was so easily hoodwinked as M. Bergeret, whom she despised for his credulity. Finally, she was in that state of anxiety into which a new and unprecedented situation always throws one.

M. Roux repeated the comforting assurance which he had first made to himself:

"I am sure he did not see us. He only looked at the table."

And when Madame Bergeret still remained doubtful, he declared that anyone sitting on the couch could not be seen from the doorway. Of this Madame Bergeret tried to make sure. She went and stood in the doorway, while M. Roux stretched himself on the sofa, to represent the surprised lovers.

The test did not seem conclusive, and it fell next to M. Roux's turn to go to the door, while Madame Bergeret reconstructed their love scene.

Solemnly, coldly, and even with some show of sulkiness to each other, they repeated this process several times. But M. Roux did not succeed in soothing Madame Bergeret's doubts.

At last he lost his temper and exclaimed:

"Well! if he did see us, anyway he's a precious ——."

Here he used a word which was unfamiliar to Madame Bergeret's ears, but which sounded to her coarse, unseemly and abominably offensive. She was disgusted with M. Roux for having permitted himself to use such a term.

Thinking that he would only injure Madame Bergeret more by remaining longer in her company,

M. Roux whispered a few consoling phrases in her ear and then began to tiptoe towards the door. His natural sense of decorum made him unwilling to risk a meeting with the kindly master whom he had wronged. Left alone in this way, Madame Bergeret went to her own room to think.

It did not seem to her that what had just taken place was important in itself. In the first place, if this was the first time that she had permitted herself to be compromised by M. Roux, it was not the first time that she had been indiscreet with others, few in number as they might be. Besides, an act like this may be horrible in thought, while in actual performance it merely appears commonplace, dependent upon circumstances and naturally innocent. In face of reality, prejudice dies away. Madame Bergeret was not a woman carried away from her homely, middle-class destiny by invincible forces hidden in the secret depths of her nature. Although she possessed a certain temperament, she was still rational and very careful of her reputation. She never sought for adventures, and at the age of thirty-six she had only deceived M. Bergeret three times. But these three occasions were enough to prevent her from exaggerating her fault. She was still less disposed to do so, since this third adventure was in essentials only a repetition of the first two, and these had been neither painful nor pleasur-

able enough to play a large part in her memory. No phantoms of remorse started up before the matron's large, fishy eyes. She regarded herself as an honourable woman in the main, and only felt irritated and ashamed at having allowed herself to be caught by a husband for whom she had the most profound scorn. She felt this misfortune the more, because it had come upon her in maturity, when she had arrived at the period of calm reflection. On the two former occasions the intrigue had begun in the same way. Usually Madame Bergeret felt much flattered whenever she made a favourable impression on any man of position. She watched carefully for any signs of interest they might show in her, and she never considered them exaggerated in any way, for she believed herself to be very alluring. Twice before the affair with M. Roux, she had allowed things to go on up to the point where, for a woman, there is henceforth neither physical power to put a stop to them, nor moral advantage to be gained by so doing. The first time the intrigue had been with an elderly man who was very experienced, by no means egotistic, and very anxious to please her. But her pleasure in him was spoilt by the worry which always accompanies a first lapse. The second time she took more interest in the affair, but unfortunately her accomplice was lacking in experience, and now

M. Roux had caused her so much annoyance that she was unable even to remember what had happened before they were surprised. If she attempted to recall to herself their posture on the sofa, it was only in order to guess at what M. Bergeret had been able to deduce from it, so that she might make sure up to what point she could still lie to him and deceive him.

She was humiliated and annoyed, and whenever she thought of her big girls, she felt ashamed : she knew that she had made herself ridiculous. But fear was the last feeling in her mind, for either by craft or audacity, she felt sure she could manage this gentle, timid man, so ignorant of the ways of the world, so far inferior to herself.

She had never lost the idea that she was immeasurably superior to M. Bergeret. This notion inspired all her words and acts, nay, even her silence. She suffered from the pride of race, for she was a Pouilly, the daughter of Pouilly, the University Inspector, the niece of Pouilly of the Dictionary, the great-granddaughter of a Pouilly who, in 1811, composed *la Mythologie des Demoiselles* and *l'Abeille des Dames.* She had been encouraged by her father in this sentiment of family pride.

What was a Bergeret by the side of a Pouilly ? She had, therefore, no misgivings as to the result of the struggle which she foresaw, and she awaited

her husband's return with an attitude of boldness dashed with cunning. But when, at lunch time, she heard him going downstairs, a shade of anxiety crept over her mind. When he was out of her sight, this husband of hers disquieted her: he became mysterious, almost formidable. She wore out her nerves in imagining what he would say to her and in preparing different deceitful or defiant answers, according to the circumstances. She strained and stiffened her courage, in order to repel attack. She pictured to herself pitiable attitudes and threats of suicide followed by a scene of reconciliation. By the time evening came, she was thoroughly unnerved. She cried and bit her handkerchief. Now she wanted, she longed for explanations, abuse, violent speeches. She waited for M. Bergeret with burning impatience, and at nine o'clock she at last recognised his step on the landing. But he did not come into her room; the little maid came instead:

"Monsieur says," she announced, with a sly, pert grin, "that I'm to put up the iron bedstead for him in the study."

Madame Bergeret said not a word, for she was thunderstruck.

Although she slept as soundly as usual that night, yet her audacious spirit was quelled.

VIII

HE curé of Saint-Exupère, the archpriest Laprune, had been invited to déjeuner by Abbé Guitrel. They were now both seated at the little round table on which Joséphine had just set a flaming rum omelette.

M. Guitrel's maid had reached the canonical age some years ago; she wore a moustache; and assuredly bore no resemblance to the imaginary portrait of her which set the town guffawing in the ribald tales of the old Gallic type that were bandied about. Her face gave the lie to the jovial slanders which circulated from the Café du Commerce to Paillot's shop, and from the pharmacy of the radical M. Mandar, to the jansenist salon of M. Lerond, the retired judge. Even if it were true that the professor of rhetoric used to allow his servant to sit at table with him when he was dining alone, if he was in the habit of sharing with her the little cakes that he chose with such anxious care at Dame Magloire's, it was only be-

cause of his pure and innocent regard for a poor old woman, who was, in truth, both illiterate and rough, but at the same time full of crafty wisdom and devoted to her master. She was, in fact, filled with ambition for him and ready in her loyalty to betray the whole world for his sake.

Unfortunately Abbé Lantaigne, the principal of the high seminary, paid too much heed to these prurient tales about Guitrel and his domestic, which everyone repeated and which no one believed, not even M. Mandar, the chemist of the Rue Culture, the most rabid of the town councillors. He had, in fact, added too much out of his own stock-in-trade to these merry tales not to suspect in his own mind the authenticity of the whole collection. For quite a voluminous cycle of romance had grown up round these two prosaic people. Had he only known the *Decameron*, the *Heptameron* and the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles* better, M. Lantaigne would frequently have discovered the source of this droll adventure, or of that weird anecdote, which the county town generously added to the legend of M. Guitrel and his servant Joséphine. M. Mazure, the keeper of the municipal archives, never failed for his part, whenever he had found some lewd story of a Churchman in an old book, to assign it

to M. Guitrel. Only M. Lantaigne actually swallowed what everyone else said without believing.

"Patience, Monsieur l'abbé!" said Joséphine; "I will go and fetch a spoon to baste it with."

So saying she took a long-handled pewter spoon from the sideboard drawer and handed it to M. Guitrel. Whilst the priest poured the flaming spirit over the frizzling sugar, which gave out a smell of caramel, the servant leant against the sideboard with her arms crossed and stared at the musical clock which hung on the wall in a gilt frame; a Swiss landscape, with a train coming out of a tunnel, a balloon in the air, and the enamelled dial affixed to a little church tower. The observant woman was really watching her master, for his short arm was beginning to ache with wielding the hot spoon. She began to spur him on:

"Look sharp, Monsieur l'abbé! Don't let it go out."

"This dish," said the arch-priest, "really gives out a most delicious odour. The last time I had one like it made for me, the dish split on account of the heat and the rum ran over the table-cloth. I was much vexed, and what annoyed me still more was to see the consternation on

M. Tabarit's face, for it happened when he was dining with me."

"That's just it!" exclaimed the servant. "M. *l'archiprêtre* had it served on a dish of fine porcelain. Of course, nothing could be too fine for Monsieur. But the finer the china is, the worse it stands fire. This dish here is of earthenware, and heat or cold makes no odds to it. When my master is a bishop he'll have his omelettes soufflées served on a silver dish."

All of a sudden the flame flickered out in the pewter spoon and M. Guitrel stopped basting the omelette. Then he turned towards the woman and said with a stern glance:

"Joséphine, you must never, in future, let me hear you talk in that fashion."

"But, my dear Guitrel," said the curé of Saint-Exupère, "it is only you yourself who can take exception to such words, for to others it would seem only natural. You have been endowed with the precious gift of intelligence. Your knowledge is profound and, were you raised to a bishopric, it would only seem a fitting thing. Who knows whether this simple woman has not uttered a true prophecy? Has not your name been mentioned among those of the priests considered eligible for the episcopal chair of Tourcoing?"

M. Guitrel pricked up his ears and gave a side-long glance, with one eye full on the other's profile.

He was, indeed, feeling very anxious, for his affairs were by no means in a promising state. At the nunciature he had been obliged to content himself with vague promises and he was beginning to be afraid of their Roman caution. It seemed to him that M. Lantaigne was in good odour at the Department of Religion, and, in short, his visit to Paris had only filled him with disquieting fancies. And now, if he was giving a lunch to the curé of Saint-Exupère, it was merely because the latter had the key to all the wire-pulling in M. Lantaigne's party. M. Guitrel hoped, therefore, to worm out of the worthy curé all his opponent's secrets.

"And why," continued the arch-priest, "should you not be a bishop one of these days, like M. Lantaigne?"

In the silence that followed the utterance of this name, the musical clock struck out a shrill little tune of the olden days. It was the hour of noon.

The hand with which Abbé Guitrel passed the earthenware dish to the arch-priest trembled a little.

"There is," said the latter, "a mellowness about

this dish, a mellowness that is not insipid. Your servant is a first-rate cook."

"You were speaking of M. Lantaigne?" queried Abbé Guitrel.

"I was," replied the arch-priest. "I don't mean to say that at this precise moment M. Lantaigne is the bishop-designate of Tourcoing, for to say that would be to anticipate the course of events. But I heard this very morning from someone who is very intimate with the Vicar-General that the nunciature and the ministry are practically in agreement as to the appointment of M. Lantaigne. But this, of course, still lacks confirmation and it is quite possible that M. de Goulet may have taken his hopes for accomplished facts, for, as you know, he ardently desires M. Lantaigne's success. But that the principal will be successful seems quite probable. It is true that some time ago a certain uncompromising attitude, which it was believed might be justly attributed to M. Lantaigne's opinions, may perchance have given offence to the powers that be, inspired as they were with a harassing distrust of the clergy. But times are changed. These heavy clouds of mistrust have rolled away. Certain influences, too, that were formerly considered outside the sphere of politics are beginning to work now, even in governmental circles. They tell me, in fact, that General

Cartier de Chalmot's support of M. Lantaigne's candidature has been all-powerful. This is the gossip, the still unauthenticated report, that I have heard."

The servant Joséphine had left the room, but her anxious shadow still flashed from moment to moment through the half-open door.

M. Guitrel neither spoke nor ate.

"This omelette," said the arch-priest, "has a curious mixture of flavours which tickles the palate without allowing one to distinguish just what it is that is so delightful. Will you permit me to ask your servant for the recipe?"

An hour later M. Guitrel bade farewell to his guest, and set out, with shoulders bent low, for the seminary. Buried in thought, he descended the winding, slanting street of the Chantres, crossing his great-coat over his chest against the icy wind which was buffeting the gable of the cathedral. It was the coldest, darkest corner of the town. He hastened his pace as far as the Rue du Marché, and there he stopped before the butcher's shop kept by Lafolie.

It was barred like a lion's cage. Under the quarters of mutton hung up by hooks, the butcher lay asleep on the ground, close against the board used for cutting up the meat. His brawny limbs were now relaxed in utter weariness, for his day's

work had begun at daybreak. With his bare arms crossed, he lay slowly nodding his head. His steel was still hanging at his side and his legs were stretched out under a blood-stained white apron. His red face was shining, and under the turned-down collar of his pink shirt the veins of his neck swelled up. From the recumbent figure breathed a sense of quiet power. M. Bergeret, indeed, always used to say of Lafolie that from him one could gather some idea of the Homeric heroes, because his manner of life resembled theirs since, like them, he shed the blood of victims.

Butcher Lafolie slept. Near him slept his son, tall and strong like his father, and with ruddy cheeks. The butcher's boy, with his head in his hands, was asleep on the marble slab, with his hair dangling among the spread-out joints of meat. Behind her glazed partition at the entrance of the shop sat Madame Lafolie, bolt upright, but with heavy eyes weighed down by sleep. She was a fat woman, with a huge bosom, her flesh saturated with the blood of beasts. The whole family had a look of brutal, yet masterly, power, an air of barbaric royalty.

With his quick glance shifting from one to the other, M. Guitrel stood watching them for a long while. Again and again he turned with special

interest towards the master, the colossus whose purpled cheeks were barred by a long reddish moustache, and who, now that his eyes were shut, showed on his temples the little wrinkles that speak of cunning. Then, surfeited of the sight of this violent, crafty brute, and gripping his old umbrella under his arm, he crossed his great-coat over his chest once more, and continued his way. He was quite in good spirits once more, as he thought to himself:

"Eight thousand, three hundred and twenty-five francs last year. One thousand, nine hundred and six this year. Abbé Lantaigne, principal of the high seminary, owes ten thousand, two hundred and thirty-one francs to Lafolie the butcher, who is by no means an easy-going creditor. Abbé Lantaigne will not be a bishop."

For a long while he had been aware that M. Lantaigne was in financial straits, and that the college was heavily in debt. To-day his servant Joséphine had just informed him that Lafolie was showing his teeth and talking of suing the seminary and the archbishopric for debt. Trotting along with his mincing step, M. Guitrel murmured:

"M. Lantaigne will never be a bishop. He is honest enough, but he is a bad manager. Now a bishopric is just an administration. Bossuet said so in express terms when he was

delivering the funeral oration of the Prince de Condé."

And in mentally recalling the horrible face of Lafolie the butcher, M. Guitrel felt no repugnance whatever.

IX

MEANWHILE M. Bergeret was re-reading the meditations of Marcus Aurelius. He had a fellow-feeling for Faustina's husband, yet he found it impossible really to appreciate all the fine thought contained in this little book, so false to nature seemed its sentiments, so harsh its philosophy, so scornful of the softer side of life its whole tone. Next he read the tales of Sieur d'Ouville, and those of Eutrapel, the *Cymbalum* of Despériers, the *Matinées* of Cholière and the *Serées* of Guillaume Bouchet. He took more pleasure in this course of reading, for he perceived that it was suitable to one in his position and therefore edifying, that it tended to diffuse serene peace and heavenly gentleness in his soul. He returned grateful thanks to the whole band of romance-writers who all, from the dweller in old Miletus, where was told the Tale of the Wash-tub, to the wielders of the spicy wit of Burgundy, the charm of Touraine, and the broad humour of Normandy,

have helped to turn the sorrow of harassed hearts into the ways of pleasant mirth by teaching men the art of indulgent laughter.[1]

"These romancers," thought he, "who make austere moralists knit their brows, are themselves excellent moralists, who should be loved and praised for having gracefully suggested the simplest, the most natural, the most humane solutions of domestic difficulties, difficulties which the pride and hatred of the savage heart of man would fain solve by murder and bloodshed. O Milesian romancers! O shrewd Petronius! O Noël du Fail," cried he, "O forerunners of Jean de La Fontaine! what apostle was wiser or better than you, who are commonly called good-for-nothing rascals? O benefactors of humanity! you have taught us the true science of life, a kindly scorn of the human race!"

[1] In his study of mediæval romances, M. Bergeret devotes himself to the *Conte badin*, or jesting tale of ludicrous adventure by which so much of Chaucer's work was inspired. This school of short stories starts with the tales of Aristeides of Miletus, a writer of the second century B.C. His *Milésiaques*, as they are called, were followed by the fabliaux of the Middle Ages, and in the fifteenth century and onwards by the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles* of Louis XI's time, by the *Heptaméron* of the Queen of Navarre, the *Decameron* of Boccaccio and the *Contes* of Despériers, of Guillaume Bouchet, of Noël du Fail and others. La Fontaine retold many of the older tales in verse and Balzac tried to revive the Gallic wit and even the language of the fabliaux in his *Contes drôlatiques*.

Thus did M. Bergeret fortify himself with the thought that our pride is the original source of all our misery, that we are, in fact, but monkeys in clothes, and that we have solemnly applied conceptions of honour and virtue to matters where these are ridiculous. Pope Boniface VIII, in fact, was wise in thinking that, in his own case, a mountain was being made out of a mole-hill, and Madame Bergeret and M. Roux were just about as worthy of praise or blame as a pair of chimpanzees. Yet, he was too clear-sighted to pretend to deny the close bond that united him to these two principal actors in his drama. But he only regarded himself as a meditative chimpanzee, and he derived from the idea a sensation of gratified vanity. For wisdom invariably goes astray somewhere.

M. Bergeret's, indeed, failed in another point: he did not really adapt his conduct to his maxims, and although he showed no violence, he never gave the least hint of forbearance. Thus he by no means proved himself the follower of those Milesian, Latin, Florentine, or Gallic romance-writers whose smiling philosophy he admired as being well suited to the absurdity of human nature. He never reproached Madame Bergeret, it is true, but neither did he speak a word, or throw a glance in her direction. Even when seated

opposite her at table, he seemed to have the power of never seeing her. And if by chance he met her in one of the rooms of the flat, he gave the poor woman the impression that she was invisible.

He ignored her, he treated her not only as a stranger, but as non-existent. He ousted her both from visual and mental consciousness. He annihilated her. In the house, among the numberless preoccupations of their life together, he neither saw her, heard her, nor formed any perception of her. Madame Bergeret was a coarse-grained, troublesome woman, but she was a homely, moral creature after all; she was human and living, and she suffered keenly at not being allowed to burst out into vulgar chatter, into threatening gestures and shrill cries. She suffered at no longer feeling herself the mistress of the house, the presiding genius of the kitchen, the mother of the family, the matron. Worst of all, she suffered at feeling herself done away with, at feeling that she no longer counted as a person, or even as a thing. During meals she at last reached the point of longing to be a chair or a plate, so that her presence might at least be recognised. If M. Bergeret had suddenly drawn the carving-knife on her, she would have cried for joy, although she was by nature timid of a blow. But not to

count, not to matter, not to be seen, was insupportable to her dull, heavy temperament. The monotonous and incessant punishment that M. Bergeret inflicted on her was so cruel that she was obliged to stuff her handkerchief into her mouth to stifle her sobs. And M. Bergeret, shut up in his study, used to hear her noisily blowing her nose in the dining-room while he himself was placidly sorting the slips for his *Virgilius nauticus*, unmoved by either love or hate.

Every evening Madame Bergeret was sorely tempted to follow her husband into the study that had now become his bedroom as well, and the impregnable fastness of his impregnable will. She longed either to ask his forgiveness, or to overwhelm him with the lowest abuse, to prick his face with the point of a kitchen-knife or to slash herself in the breast—one or the other, indifferently, for all she wanted was to attract his notice to herself, just to exist for him. And this thing which was denied her, she needed with the same overpowering need with which one craves bread, water, air, salt.

She still despised M. Bergeret, for this feeling was hereditary and filial in her nature. It came to her from her father and flowed in her blood. She would no longer have been a Pouilly, the niece of Pouilly of the Dictionary, if she had acknowledged any kind of equality between herself and her hus-

band. She despised him because she was a Pouilly and he was a Bergeret, and not because she had deceived him. She had the good sense not to plume herself too much on this superiority, but it is more than probable that she despised him for not having killed M. Roux. Her scorn was a fixed quantity, capable neither of increase nor decrease. Nevertheless, she felt no hatred for him, although until lately, she had rather enjoyed tormenting and annoying him in the ordinary affairs of every day, by scolding him for the untidiness of his clothes and the tactlessness of his behaviour, or by telling him interminable anecdotes about the neighbours, trivial and silly stories in which even the malice and ill-nature were but commonplace. For this wind-bag of a mind produced neither bitter venom nor strange poison and was but puffed up by the breath of vanity.

Madame Bergeret was admirably calculated to live on good terms with a mate whom she could betray and brow-beat in the calm assurance of her power and by the natural working of her vigorous physique. Having no inner life of her own and being exuberantly healthy of body, she was a gregarious creature, and when M. Bergeret was suddenly withdrawn from her life, she missed him as a good wife misses an absent husband. Moreover, this meagre little man, whom she had always considered

insignificant and unimportant, but not troublesome, now filled her with dread. By treating her as an absolute nonentity, M. Bergeret made her really feel that she no longer existed. She seemed to herself enveloped in nothingness. At this new, unknown, nameless state, akin to solitude and death, she sank into melancholy and terror. At night, her anguish became cruel, for she was sensitive to nature and subject to the influence of time and space. Alone in her bed, she used to gaze in horror at the wicker-work woman on which she had draped her dresses for so many years and which, in the days of her pride and light-heartedness, used to stand in M. Bergeret's study, proudly upright, all body and no head. Now, bandy-legged and mutilated, it leant wearily against the glass-fronted wardrobe, in the shadow of the curtain of purple rep. Lenfant the cooper had found it in his yard amongst the tubs of water with their floating corks, and when he brought it to Madame Bergeret, she dared not set it up again in the study, but had carried it instead into the conjugal chamber where, wounded, drooping, and struck by emblematic wrath, it now stood like a symbol that represented notions of black magic to her mind.

She suffered cruelly. When she awoke one morning a melancholy ray of pale sunlight was shining between the folds of the curtain on the

mutilated wicker dummy and, as she lay watching it, she melted with self-pity at the thought of her own innocence and M. Bergeret's cruelty. She felt instinct with rebellion. It was intolerable, she thought, that Amélie Pouilly should suffer by the act of a Bergeret. She mentally communed with the soul of her father and so strengthened herself in the idea that M. Bergeret was too paltry a man to make her unhappy. This sense of pride gave her relief and supplied her with confidence to bedeck herself, buoying her mind with the assurance that she had not been humiliated and that everything was as it always had been.

It was Madame Leterrier's At Home day, and Madame Bergeret set out, therefore, to call on the rector's highly respected wife. In the blue drawing-room she found her hostess sitting with Madame Compagnon, the wife of the mathematical professor, and after the first greetings were over, she heaved a deep sigh. It was a provocative sigh, rather than a down-trodden one, and while the two university ladies were still giving ear to it, Madame Bergeret added :

"There are many reasons for sadness in this life, especially for anyone who is not naturally inclined to put up with everything. . . . You are a happy woman, Madame Leterrier, and so are you, Madame Compagnon ! . . ."

And Madame Bergeret, becoming humble, discreet and self-controlled, said nothing more, though fully conscious of the inquiring glances directed towards her. But this was quite enough to give people to understand that she was ill-used and humiliated in her home. Before, there had been whispers in the town about M. Roux's attentions to her, but from that day forth Madame Leterrier set herself to put an end to the scandal, declaring that M. Roux was a well-bred, honourable young man. Speaking of Madame Bergeret, she added, with moist lips and tear-filled eyes :

"That poor woman is very unhappy and very sensitive."

Within six weeks the drawing-rooms of the county town had made up their minds and come over to Madame Bergeret's side. They declared that M. Bergeret, who never paid calls, was a worthless fellow. They suspected him of secret debauchery and hidden vice, and his friend, M. Mazure, his comrade at the academy of old books, his colleague at Paillot's, was quite sure that he had seen him one evening going into the restaurant in the Rue des Hebdomadiers, a place of questionable repute.

Whilst M. Bergeret was thus being tried by the tribunal of society and found wanting, the popular voice was crowning him with quite a different

reputation. Of the vulgar symbol that had lately appeared on the front of his own house only very indistinct traces remained. But phantoms of the same design began to increase and multiply in the town, and now M. Bergeret could not go to the college, nor on the Mall, nor to Paillot's shop, without seeing his own portrait on some wall, drawn in the primitive style of all such ribaldries, surrounded by obscene, suggestive, or idiotic scrawls, and either pencilled or chalked or traced with the point of a stone and accompanied by an explanatory legend.

M. Bergeret was neither angered nor vexed at the sight of these *graffiti ;* he was only annoyed at the increasing number of them. There was one on the white wall of Goubeau's cow-house on the Tintelleries ; another on the yellow frontage of Deniseau's agency in the Place Saint-Exupère ; another on the grand theatre under the list of admission rates at the second pay-box ; another at the corner of the Rue de la Pomme and the Place du Vieux-Marché ; another on the outbuildings of the Nivert mansion, next to the Gromances' residence ; another on the porter's lodge at the University ; and yet another on the wall of the gardens of the prefecture. And every morning M. Bergeret found yet newer ones. He noted, too, that these *graffiti* were not all from the same hand. In some, the man's figure was drawn in quite

primitive style ; others were better drawn, without showing, however, upon examination, any approach to individual likeness or the difficult art of portraiture. But in every case the bad drawing was supplemented by a written explanation, and in all these popular caricatures M. Bergeret wore horns. He noticed that sometimes these horns projected from a bare skull, sometimes from a tall hat.

"Two schools of art!" thought he.

But his refined nature suffered.

X

WORMS-CLAVELIN had insisted on his old friend, Georges Frémont, staying to déjeuner. Frémont, an inspector of fine art, was going on circuit through the department. When they had first met in the painters' studios at Montmartre, Frémont was young and Worms-Clavelin very young. They had not a single idea in common, and they had no points of agreement at all. Frémont loved to contradict, and Worms-Clavelin put up with it; Frémont was fluent and violent in speech, Worms-Clavelin always yielded to his vehemence and spoke but little. For a time they were comrades, and then life separated them. But every time that they happened to meet, they once more became intimate and quarrelled zestfully. For Georges Frémont, middle-aged, portly, beribboned, well-to-do, still retained something of his youthful fire. This morning, sitting between Madame Worms-Clavelin in a morning gown and M. Worms-Clavelin in a breakfast

jacket, he was telling his hostess how he had discovered in the garrets at the museum, where it had been buried in dust and rubbish, a little wooden figure in the purest style of French art. It was a Saint Catherine habited in the garb of a townswoman of the fifteenth century, a tiny figure with wonderful delicacy of expression and with such a thoughtful, honest look that he felt the tears rise to his eyes as he dusted her. M. Worms-Clavelin inquired if it were a statue or a picture, and Georges Frémont, glancing at him with a look of kindly scorn, said gently :

"Worms, don't try to understand what I am saying to your wife ! You are utterly incapable of conceiving the Beautiful in any form whatever. Harmonious lines and noble thoughts will always be written in an unknown tongue as far as you are concerned."

M. Worms-Clavelin shrugged his shoulders :

"Shut up, you old communard !" said he.

Georges Frémont actually was an old communard. A Parisian, the son of a furniture maker in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, and a pupil at the Beaux-Arts, he was twenty at the time of the German invasion, and had enlisted in a regiment of *francs-tireurs* who never saw service. For this slight Frémont had never forgiven Trochu. At the time of the capitulation he was one of the most excited,

and shouted with the rest that Paris had been betrayed. But he was no fool, and really meant that Paris had been badly defended, which was true enough, of course. He was for war to the knife. When the Commune was proclaimed, he declared for it. On the proposition of one of his father's old workmen, a certain citizen Charlier, delegate for the Beaux-Arts, he was appointed assistant sub-director of the Museum of the Louvre. It was an honorary appointment and he performed his duties booted, with cartridges in his belt, and on his head a Tyrolese hat adorned with cock feathers. At the beginning of the siege the canvases had been rolled up, put into packing-cases and carried away to warehouses from which he never succeeded in unearthing them. The only duty that remained to him was to smoke his pipe in galleries that had been transformed into guard-rooms and to gossip with the National Guard, to whom he denounced Badinguet for having destroyed the Rubens pictures by a cleaning process which had removed the glaze. He based his grounds for this accusation on the authority of a newspaper article, backed up by M. Vitet's opinion. The federalists sat on the benches and listened to him, with their guns between their legs, whilst they drank their pints of wine in the palace precincts, for it was warm weather. When, however,

the people of Versailles forced their way into Paris by the broken-down Porte du Point-du-Jour and the cannonade approached the Tuileries, Georges Frémont was much distressed to see the National Guard of the federalists rolling casks of petroleum into the Apollo gallery. It was with great difficulty that he at length succeeded in dissuading them from saturating the wainscoting to make it blaze. Then, giving them money for drink, he got rid of them. After they had gone, he managed, with the assistance of the Bonapartist guards, to roll these dangerous casks to the foot of the staircase and to push them as far as the bank of the Seine. When the colonel of the federalists was informed of this, he suspected Frémont of betraying the popular cause and ordered him to be shot. But as soon as the Versailles mob was approaching and the smoke of the blazing Tuileries rising into the air, Frémont fled, cheek by jowl with the squad that had been ordered out to execute him. Two days later, being denounced to the Versailles party, he was a fugitive from the military tribunal for having taken part in a rebellion against the established Government. And it was perfectly certain that the Versailles party was in direct succession, since having followed the Empire on September 4th, 1870, it had adopted and retained the recognised procedure of the preceding Govern-

ment, whilst the Commune, which had never succeeded in establishing those telegraphic communications that are absolutely essential to a recognised government, found itself undone and destroyed—and, in fact, very much in the wrong. Besides, the Commune was the outcome of a revolution carried out in face of the enemy, and this the Versailles administration could never forgive, for its origin recalled their own. It was for this reason that a captain of the winning side, being employed in shooting rebels in the neighbourhood of the Louvre, ordered his men to search for Frémont and shoot him. At last, after remaining in hiding for a fortnight with citizen Charlier, a member of the Commune, under a roof in the Place de la Bastille, Frémont left Paris in a smock-frock, with a whip in his hand, behind a market-gardener's cart. And whilst a court-martial at Versailles was condemning him to death, he was earning his livelihood in London by drawing up a complete catalogue of Rowlandson's works for a rich City amateur. Being an intelligent, industrious and honourable man, he soon became well known and respected among the English artists. He loved art passionately, but politics scarcely interested him at all. He remained friendly towards the Commune through loyalty alone and in order to avoid the shame of

deserting vanquished friends. But he dressed well and moved in good society. He worked strenuously and, at the same time, knew how to profit by his work. His *Dictionnaire des monogrammes* not only established his reputation, but brought him in some money. After the amnesty had been passed and the last fluttering rags of civil strife had blown away, there landed at Boulogne, after Gambetta's motion, a certain gentleman, haughty and smiling, yet not unsociable. He was youngish, but a little worn by work, and with a few grey hairs; he was correctly dressed in a travelling costume and carried a portmanteau packed with sketches and manuscripts. Establishing himself in modest style at Montmartre, Georges Frémont quickly became intimate with the artist colony there. But the labours upon the emoluments from which he had mainly supported himself in England only brought him the satisfaction of gratified vanity in France. Then Gambetta obtained for him an appointment as inspector of museums, and Frémont fulfilled his duties in this department both conscientiously and skilfully. He had a true and delicate taste in art. The nervous sensitiveness which had moved him deeply in his youth before the spectacle of his country's wounds, still affected him, now that he was growing old, when confronted by unhappy

social conditions, but enabled him, too, to derive delight from the graceful expression of human thought, from exquisite shapes, from the classic line, and the heroic cast of a face. With all this he was patriotic even in art, never jesting about the Burgundian school, faithful to political sentiment, and relying on France to bring justice and liberty to the universe.

"You old communard!" repeated M. Worms-Clavelin.

"Hold your tongue, Worms! Your soul is ignoble and your mind obtuse. You have no meaning in yourself, but, in the phrase of to-day, you are a representative type. Just Heavens! how many victims were butchered during a whole century of civil war just that M. Worms-Clavelin might become a republican *préfet!* Worms, you are lower in the scale than the *préfets* of the Empire."

"The Empire!" exclaimed M. Worms-Clavelin. "Blast the Empire! First of all it swept us all into the abyss, and then it made me an official. But, all the same, wine is made, corn is grown, just as in the time of the Empire; they bet on the Bourse, as under the Empire; one eats, drinks, and makes love, as under the Empire. At bottom, life is just the same. How could government and administration be different? There are certain

shades of difference, I grant you. We have more liberty; we even have too much of it. We have more security. We enjoy a government which suits the ideals of the people. As far as such a thing is possible, we are the masters of our fate. All the social forces are now held in just balance, or nearly so. Now just you show me what there is that could be changed. The colour of our postage stamps perhaps . . . and after that! . . . As old Montessuy used to say, 'No, no, friend, short of changing the French, there is nothing in France to change.' Of course, I am all for progress. One must talk about moving, were it only in order to dispense with movement. 'Forward! forward!' The *Marseillaise* must have been useful in *not* carrying one to the frontier! . . ."

The look which Georges Frémont turned on the *préfet* was full of deep, affectionate, kindly, thoughtful scorn:

"Everything is as perfect as it can be, then, Worms?"

"Don't make out that I speak like an utter dolt. Nothing is perfect, but all things cling together, prop one another up, dovetail with one another. It is just like père Mulot's wall which you can see from here behind the orangery. It is all warped and cracked and leans forward. For the last thirty years that fool of a Quatrebarbe, the

diocesan architect, has been stopping dead in front of Mulot's house. Then, with his nose in air, his hands behind his back and his legs apart, he says: 'I really don't see how that holds together!' The little imps coming out from school stand behind him and shout in mockery of his gruff tones: 'I really don't see how that holds together!' He turns round and, seeing nobody, looks at the pavement as though the echo of his voice had risen from the earth. Then he goes away repeating, 'I really don't see how that holds together!' It holds together because nobody touches it; because père Mulot summons neither masons nor architects; above all, because he takes good care not to ask M. Quatrebarbe for his advice. It holds together because up till now it has held together. It holds together, you old dreamer, because they neither revise the taxes nor reform the Constitution."

"That is to say, it holds together through fraud and iniquity," said Georges Frémont. "We have fallen into a cauldron of shame. Our finance ministers are under the thumb of the cosmopolitan banking-houses. And, sadder still, it is France—France, of old the deliverer of the nations—that has no care in European politics save to avenge the rights of titled sovereigns. Without even daring to shudder, we permitted the massacre of

three hundred thousand Christians in the East, although, by our traditions, we had been constituted their revered and august protectors. We have betrayed not only the interests of humanity, but our own ; and now you may see the Republic floating in Cretan waters among the Powers of Europe, like a guinea-fowl amid a flock of gulls. It was to this point, then, that our friendship with our ally was to lead us."

The *préfet* protested :

"Don't attack the Russian entente, Frémont. It's the very best of all the electioneering baits."

"The Russian alliance," replied Frémont, waving his fork, "I hailed the birth of it with joyful expectation. But, alas, did it not, at the very first test, fling us into the arms of that assassin the Sultan and lead us to Crete, there to hurl melinite shell at Christians whose only fault was the long oppression they had suffered? But it was not Russia that we took such pains to humour, it was the great bankers interested in Ottoman bonds. And you saw how the glorious victory of Canea was hailed by the Jewish financiers with a burst of generous enthusiasm."

"There you go," cried the *préfet*, "that's just sentimental politics! You ought to know, at any rate, where that sort of thing leads. And why the

deuce you should be excited about the Greeks, I don't see. They're not at all interesting."

"You are right, Worms," said the inspector of fine arts. "You are perfectly right. The Greeks are not interesting, for they are poor. They have nothing but their blue sea, their violet hills and the fragments of their statues. The honey of Hymettus is never quoted on the Bourse. The Turks, on the contrary, are well worthy of the attention of European financiers. They have internal dissensions ; above all they have resources. They pay badly and they pay much. One can do business with them. Stocks rise. All is well then. Such are the ideals of our foreign policy ! "

M. Worms-Clavelin interrupted him hurriedly, and casting on him a reproachful look, said :

"Ah, now ! Georges, don't be disingenuous. You know well enough that we neither have, nor can have, any foreign policy."

XI

"IT seems that it is fixed for tomorrow," said M. de Terremondre as he entered Paillot's shop.

Everyone understood the allusion : he was referring to the execution of Lecœur, the butcher's assistant, who had been sentenced to death on the 27th of November, for the murder of Madame Houssieu. This young criminal supplied the entire township with an interest in life. Judge Roquincourt, who had a reputation in society as a ladies' man, had courteously admitted Madame Dellion and Madame de Gromance to the prison and allowed them a glimpse of the prisoner through the barred grating of the cell where he was playing cards with a gaoler. In his turn, the governor of the prison, M. Ossian Colot, an officer of the Academy, gladly did the honours of his condemned prisoner to journalists as well as to prominent townsmen. M. Ossian Colot had written with the knowledge of an expert on various questions of the penal

code. He was proud of his establishment, which was run on the most up-to-date lines, and he by no means despised popularity. The visitors cast curious glances at Lecœur, while they speculated on the relationship between this youth of twenty and the nonagenarian widow who had become his victim. They stood stupefied by astonishment before this monstrous brute. Yet Abbé Tabarit, the prison chaplain, told with tears in his eyes how the poor lad had expressed the most edifying sentiments of repentance and piety. Meanwhile, from morning to night throughout three whole months, Lecœur played cards with his gaolers and disputed the points in their own slang, for they were of the same class. His darkened soul never revealed its sufferings in words, but the rosy, chubby lad who, only ten months before, was to be met whistling in the street with his basket on his head, and his white apron knotted round his muscular loins, now shivered in his strait waistcoat with pale, cadaverous face and looked like a sick man of forty. His herculean neck was wasted and now protruded from his drooping shoulders, thin and disproportionately long. By this time it was agreed on all sides that he had exhausted the abhorrence, the pity and the curiosity of his fellow-citizens, and that it was high time to put an end to him.

"For six o'clock to-morrow. I heard it from Surcouf himself," added M. de Terremondre. "They've got the guillotine at the station."

"That's a good thing," said Dr. Fornerol. "For three nights the crowd has been congregating at the cross-roads of les Évées and there have been several accidents. Julien's son fell from a tree on his head and cracked his skull. I'm afraid it's impossible to save him.

"As for the condemned," continued the doctor, "nobody, not even the President of the Republic, could prolong his life. For this young lad who was vigorous and sound up to the time of his arrest is now in the last stage of consumption."

"Have you seen him in his cell, then?" asked Paillot.

"Several times," answered Dr. Fornerol, "and I have even attended him professionally at Ossian Colot's request, for he is always deeply interested in the moral and physical well-being of his boarders."

"He's a real philanthropist," answered M. de Terremondre. "And the fact ought to be recognised that, in its way, our municipal prison is an admirable institution, with its clean, white cells, all radiating from a central watch-tower, and so skilfully arranged that all the occupants are constantly under observation without being aware of the fact. Nothing can be said against it, it is complete and

modern and all on the newest lines. Last year, when I was on a walking tour in Morocco, I saw at Tangier, in a courtyard shaded by a mulberry tree, a wretched building of mud and plaster, with a huge negro dressed in rags lying asleep in front of it. Being a soldier, he was armed with a cudgel. Swarthy hands clasping wicker baskets were projecting from the narrow windows of the building. These belonged to the prisoners, who were offering the passers-by the products of their lazy efforts, in exchange for a copper or two. Their guttural voices whined out prayers and complaints, which were harshly punctuated at intervals by curses and furious shouts. For they were all shut up together in a vast hall and spent the time in quarrelling with one another about the apertures, through which they all wanted to pass their baskets. Whenever a dispute was too noisy, the black soldier would wake up and force both baskets and suppliant hands back within the walls by a vigorous onslaught of his cudgel. In a few seconds, however, more hands would appear, all sunburnt and tattooed in blue like the first ones. I had the curiosity to peep into the prison hall through the chinks in an old wooden door. I could see in the dim-lit, shadowy place a horde of tatterdemalions scattered over the damp ground, bronzed bodies sleeping on piles of red rags, solemn faces with long venerable beards beneath

their turbans, nimble blackamoors weaving baskets with shouts of laughter. On swollen limbs here and there could be seen soiled linen bandages barely hiding sores and ulcers, and one could see and hear the vermin wave and rustle in all directions. Sometimes a laugh passed round the room. And a black hen was pecking at the filthy ground with her beak. The soldier allowed me to watch the prisoners as long as I liked, waiting for me to go, before he begged of me. Then I thought of the governor of our splendid municipal prison, and I said to myself: 'If only M. Ossian Colot were to come to Tangier he would soon discover and sweep away this crowding, this horrible promiscuity.'"

"You paint a picture of barbarism which I recognise," answered M. Bergeret. "It is far less cruel than civilisation. For these Mussulman prisoners have no sufferings to undergo, save such as arise from the indifference or the occasional savagery of their gaolers. At least the philanthropists leave them alone and their life is endurable, for they escape the torture of the cell system, and in comparison with the cell invented by the penal code of science, every other sort of prison is quite pleasant.

"There is," continued M. Bergeret, "a peculiar savagery in civilised peoples, which surpasses in cruelty all that the imagination of barbarism can conceive. A criminal expert is a much fiercer

being than a savage, and a philanthropist will invent tortures unknown in China or Persia. A Persian executioner kills his prisoners by starving them, but it required a philanthropist to conceive the idea of killing them with solitude. It is on the principle of solitude that the punishment of the cell system depends, and no other penalty can be compared with it for duration and cruelty. The sufferer, if he is lucky, becomes mad through it, and madness mercifully destroys in him all sense of his sufferings. People imagine they are justifying this abominable system when they allege that the prisoner must be withdrawn from the bad influence of his fellows and put in a position where he cannot give way to immoral or criminal instincts. People who reason in this way are really such great fools that one can scarcely call them hypocrites."

"You are right," said M. Mazure. "But let us be just to our own age. The Revolution not only accomplished a reform in judicial procedure, but also much improved the lot of the prisoner. The dungeons of the olden times were generally dark, pestilential dens."

"It is true," replied M. Bergeret, "that men have been cruel and malicious in every age and have always delighted in tormenting the wretched. But before philanthropists arose, at any rate, men

were only tortured through a simple feeling of hatred and desire for revenge, and not for the good of their morals."

"You forget," answered M. Mazure, "that the Middle Ages gave birth to the most accursed form of philanthropy ever known—the spiritual. For it is just this name that suits the spirit of the holy Inquisition. It was through pure charity alone that this tribunal handed heretics over to the stake, and if it destroyed the body, it was, so they said, only in order to save the soul."

"They never said that," answered M. Bergeret, "and they never thought it. Victor Hugo did, indeed, believe that Torquemada ordered men to be burnt for their good, in order that their eternal happiness might be secured at the price of a short pain. On this theory he constructed a drama that sparkles with the play of antithesis. But there is no foundation whatever for this idea of his, and I should never have imagined that a scholar like you, fattening, as you have done, on old parchments, would have been led astray by a poet's lies. The truth is that the tribunal of the Inquisition, in handing the heretic over to the secular arm, was simply cutting away a diseased limb from the Church, for fear lest the whole body should be contaminated. As for the limb thus cut off, its fate was in the hands of God. Such was the spirit

of the Inquisition, frightful enough, but by no means romantic. But where the Holy Office showed what you rightly call spiritual philanthropy was in the treatment it meted out to those converted from the error of their ways. It charitably condemned them to perpetual imprisonment, and immured them for the good of their souls. But I was merely referring to the State prisons, just now, such as they were in the Middle Ages and in modern times up to the reign of Louis XIV."

"It is true," said M. de Terremondre, "that the system of solitary confinement has not produced all the happy results that were expected from it in the reformation of prisoners."

"This system," said Dr. Fornerol, "often produces rather serious mental disorders. Yet it is only fair to add that criminals are naturally predisposed to troubles of this kind. We recognise to-day that the criminal is a degenerate. Thus, for instance, thanks to M. Ossian Colot's courtesy, I have been allowed to make an examination of our murderer, this fellow Lecœur. I found many physiological defects in him. . . . His teeth, for instance, are quite abnormal. I argue from that fact that he is only partially responsible for his acts."

"Yet," said M. Bergeret, "one of the sisters of Mithridates had a double row of teeth in each jaw, and in her brother's estimation, at any rate, she

was a woman of noble courage. So dearly did he love her that when he was a fugitive pursued by Lucullus, he gave orders that she should be strangled by a mute to prevent her falling alive into the hands of the Romans. Nor did she then fail to live up to her brother's lofty estimation of her character, but suffering death by the bow-string with joyous calmness, said: 'I thank the king, my brother, for having had a care to my honour, even in the midst of his own besetting troubles.' You see from this example that heroism is not impossible even with a row of abnormal teeth."

"Lecœur's case," replied the doctor, "presents many other peculiarities which cannot fail to be significant in the eyes of a scientist. Like so many born criminals his senses are blunted. Thus I found, when I examined him, that he was tattooed in every part of his body. You would be surprised at the lewd fancy shown in the choice of scenes and symbols painted on his skin."

"Really?" said M. de Terremondre.

"The skin of this patient," said Dr. Fornerol, "really ought to be properly prepared and preserved in our museum. But it is not the character of the tattooing that I want to insist upon, but rather the number of the pictures and their arrangement on the body. Certain parts of the operation

must have caused the patient an amount of pain which could scarcely have been bearable to a person of ordinary sensibility."

"There you are making a mistake!" exclaimed M. de Terremondre. "It is evident that you don't know my friend Jilly. Yet he is a very well-known man. Jilly was quite young when, in 1885 or '86, he made the tour of the world with his friend Lord Turnbridge on the yacht *Old Friend.* Jilly swears that throughout the whole voyage, through storms and calm, neither Lord Turnbridge nor himself ever put foot on deck for a single moment. The whole time they remained in the cabin drinking champagne with an old top-man of the marines who had been taught tattooing by a Tasmanian chief. In the course of the voyage this old top-man covered the two friends from head to foot with tattoo marks, and Jilly returned to France adorned with a fox-hunt that comprises as many as three hundred and twenty-four figures of men, women, horses and dogs. He is always delighted to show it when he sups with boon companions at an inn. Now I really cannot say whether Jilly is abnormally insensitive to pain, but what I can tell you is that he is a fine fellow, and a man of honour and that he is incapable of . . ."

"But," asked M. Bergeret, "do you think it right that this butcher's boy should be guillotined?

For you confess that there are such things as born criminals, and in your own phrase it seems that Lecœur was only partially responsible for his acts, through a congenital predisposition to crime."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"Then what would you do with him?" he asked.

"As a matter of fact," replied M. Bergeret, "I am but little interested in the fate of this particular man. But I am, nevertheless, opposed to the death penalty."

"Let's hear your reasons, Bergeret," said Mazure, the archivist, for to him, living as he did in admiration of '93 and the Terror, the idea of the guillotine carried with it mystic suggestions of moral beauty. "For my part, I would prohibit the death penalty in common law, but re-establish it in political cases."

M. de Terremondre had appointed Paillot's shop as a rendezvous for M. Georges Frémont, the inspector of fine arts, and just at the moment when this civic discussion was in progress, he entered the shop. They were going together to inspect Queen Marguerite's house. Now, M. Bergeret stood rather in awe of M. Frémont, for he felt himself a poor creature by the side of such a great man. For M. Bergeret, who feared nothing in the world of ideas, was very diffident where living men were concerned.

M. de Terremondre had not got the key of the house, so he sent Léon to fetch it, while he made M. Georges Frémont sit down in the corner among the old books.

"Monsieur Bergeret," said he, "is singing the praises of the old-fashioned prisons."

"Not at all," said M. Bergeret, a little annoyed, "not at all. They were nothing but sewers where the poor wretches lived chained to the wall. But, at any rate, they were not alone—they had companions—and the citizens, as well as the lords and ladies, used to come and visit them. Visiting the prisons was one of the seven works of mercy. Nobody is tempted to do that now, and if they were, the prison regulations would not allow it."

"It is true," said M. de Terremondre, "that in olden times it was customary to visit the prisoners. In my portfolios I have an engraving by Abraham Bosse, which represents a nobleman wearing a plumed felt hat, accompanying a lady in a veil of Venice point and a peaked brocade bodice, into a dungeon which is swarming with beggars clothed in a few shreds of filthy rags. The engraving is one of a set of seven original proofs which I possess. And with these one always has to be on one's guard, for nowadays they reprint them from the old worn plates."

"Visiting the prisons," said Georges Frémont,

"is a common subject of Christian art in Italy, Flanders and France. It is treated with peculiar vigour and truth in the Della Robbias on the frieze of painted terra-cotta that surrounds the hospital at Pistoia in its superb embrace. . . . You know Pistoia, Monsieur Bergeret? . . ."

The Professor had to acknowledge that he had never been in Tuscany.

Here M. de Terremondre, who was standing near the door, touched M. Frémont's arm.

"Look, Monsieur Frémont," said he, "towards the square at the right of the church. You will see the prettiest woman in the town go by."

"That's Madame de Gromance," said M. Bergeret. "She is charming."

"She occasions a lot of gossip," said M. Mazure. "She was a Demoiselle Chapon. Her father was a solicitor, and the greatest skinflint in the department. Yet she is a typical aristocrat."

"What is called the aristocratic type," said Georges Frémont, "is a pure conception of the brain. There is no more reality in it than in the classic type of the Bacchante or the Muse. I have often wondered how this aristocratic type of womanhood arose, how it managed to root itself in the popular conception. It takes its origin, I think, from several elements of real life. Among these I should point to the actresses in tragedy and

comedy, both those of the old Gymnase and of the Théâtre-Français, as well as of the Boulevard du Crime and the Porte-Saint-Martin. For a whole century these actresses have been presenting to our spectacle-loving people numberless studies of princesses and great ladies. Besides these, one must include the models from whom painters create queens and duchesses for their genre, or historical pictures. Nor must one overlook the more recent and less far-reaching, yet still powerful, influence of the mannequins, or lay-figures, of the great dressmakers, those beautiful girls with tall figures who show off a dress so superbly. Now these actresses, these models, these shop-girls, are all women of the lower class. From this I deduce the fact that the aristocratic type proceeds entirely from plebeian elegance. Hence there is nothing surprising in the fact that Madame de Gromance, *née* Chapon, should be found to belong to this type. She is graceful, and what is a rare thing in our towns, with their sharp paving-stones and dirty footpaths—she walks well. But I rather fancy she falls a little short of perfection as regards the hips. That's a serious defect!"

Lifting his nose from the thirty-eighth volume of *l'Histoire générale des Voyages*, M. Bergeret looked with admiring awe at this red-bearded Parisian who could thus pass judgment on Madame de

Gromance's delicious beauty and worshipful shape in the cold and measured accents of an inquisitor.

"Now I know your tastes," said M. de Terremondre, "I will introduce you to my aunt Courtrai. She is heavily built and can only sit down in a certain family arm-chair, which, for the past three hundred years, has been in the habit of receiving all the old ladies of Courtrai-Maillan within its capaciously wide and complacent embrace. As for her face, it suits well with the rest of her, and I hope you will like it. My aunt Courtrai is as red as a tomato, with fair moustaches that wave negligently in their beauty. Ah! my aunt Courtrai's type has no connection with your actresses, models, and dressmakers' dummies."

"I feel myself," said M. Frémont, "already much enamoured of your worthy aunt."

"The ancient nobility," said M. Mazure, "used to live the life of our large farmers of to-day, and, of course, they could not avoid resembling those whose lives they led."

"It is a well-proved fact," said Dr. Fornerol, "that the human race is degenerating."

"Do you really think so?" asked M. Frémont. "Yet in France and Italy, during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the flower of their chivalry must have been very slender. The royal coats of mail belonging to the end of the Middle Ages and

the Renaissance times were skilfully wrought, and damascened and chased with exquisite art, yet so narrow in the shoulders are they and so meagre in figure, that a man of our day could only wear them with difficulty. They were almost all made for small, slight men, and in fact, French portraits of the fifteenth century, and the miniatures of Jehan Foucquet show us a world of almost stunted folk."

Léon entered with the key, in a great state of excitement.

"It is fixed for to-morrow," he said to his master. "Deibler and his assistants came by the half-past three train. They went to the Hôtel de Paris, but there they wouldn't take them in. Then they went to the inn at the bottom of Duroc Hill, *le Cheval Bleu*, a regular cut-throat place."

"Ah, yes," said Frémont, "I heard this morning at the prefecture that there was an execution in your town. The topic was in everybody's mouth."

"There are so few amusements in the provinces!" said M. de Terremondre.

"But that spirit," said M. Bergeret, "is revolting. A legal execution takes place in secret. But why should we still carry it on at all, if we are ashamed of it? President Grévy, who was a man of great insight, practically abolished the death penalty, by never passing a sentence of death. Would that his successors had followed his ex-

ample! Personal security in the modern state is not obtained by mere fear of punishment. Many European nations have now abolished the death penalty, and in such countries crime is no more common than in the nations where this base custom yet exists. And even in countries where this practice is still found, it is in a weak and languishing condition, no longer retaining power or efficacy. It is nothing but a piece of useless unseemliness, for the practice is a mere survival of the principle on which it rested. Those ideas of right and justice which formerly laid men's heads low in majestic fashion are now shaken to their roots by the morality which has blossomed upon the natural sciences. And since the death penalty is visibly on the point of death, the wisest thing would be to let it die."

"You are right," said M. Frémont. "The death penalty has become an intolerable practice, since now we no longer connect any idea of expiation with it, for expiation is a purely theological notion."

"The President would certainly have sent a pardon," said Léon, with a consequential air. "But the crime was too horrible."

"The power of pardon," said M. Bergeret, "was one of the attributes of divine right. The king could only exercise it because, as the repre-

sentative of God on earth, he was above the ordinary human justice. In passing from the king to the President of the Republic, this right lost its essential character and therefore its legality. It thenceforth became a flimsy prerogative, a judicial power outside justice and yet no longer above it; it created an arbitrary jurisdiction, foreign to our conception of the lawgiver. In practice it is good, since by its action the wretched are saved. But bear in mind that it has become ridiculous. The mercy of the king was the mercy of God Himself, but just imagine M. Félix Faure invested with the attributes of divinity! M. Thiers, who did not fancy himself the Lord's Anointed, and who, indeed, was not consecrated at Rheims, released himself from this right of pardon by appointing a commission which was entrusted with the task of being merciful for him."

"It was only moderately so," said M. Frémont.

Here a young soldier entered the shop and asked for *Le Parfait Secrétaire.*

"Remains of barbarism," said M. Bergeret, "still persist in modern civilisation. Our code of military justice, for instance, will make our memory hateful in the eyes of the near future. That code was framed to deal with the bands of armed brigands who ravaged Europe in the eighteenth century. It was perpetuated by the

Republic of '92 and reduced to a system during the first half of this century. When a nation had taken the place of an army, they forgot to change the code, for one cannot think of everything. Those brutal laws which were framed in the first place to curb a savage soldiery are now used to govern scared young peasants, or the children of our towns, who could easily be led by kindness. And that is considered a natural proceeding!"

"I don't follow you," said M. de Terremondre. "Our military code, prepared, I believe, at the Restoration, only dates from the Second Empire. About 1875 it was revised and made to suit the new organisation of the army. You cannot, therefore, say that it was framed for the armies of former times."

"I can with truth," answered M. Bergeret, "for this code is nothing more than a mere collection of orders respecting the armies of Louis XIV and Louis XV. Everyone knows what these armies were, a conglomeration of kidnappers and kidnapped, the scourings of the country, divided into lots which were bought by the young nobles, often mere children. In such regiments discipline was maintained by perpetual threats of death. But everything is now changed: the soldiery of the monarchy and the two Empires has given place to a

vast and peaceful national guard. There is no longer any fear of mutiny or violence. Nevertheless, death at every turn still threatens these gentle flocks of peasants and artisans clumsily disguised as soldiers. The contrast between their harmless conduct and the savage laws in force against them is almost laughable. And a moment's reflection would prove that it is as absurd as it is hateful to punish with death crimes which could easily be dealt with by the simple penal code devised for the maintenance of public order."

"But," said M. de Terremondre, "the soldiers of to-day are armed as were the soldiers of former ages, and it is quite necessary that a small, unarmed body of officers should be able to ensure obedience and respect from a mob of men armed with muskets and cartridges. That's the gist of the whole matter."

"It is an ancient prejudice," said M. Bergeret, "to believe in the necessity of punishment and to fancy that the severer the punishment the more efficacious it is. The death penalty for assaulting a superior officer is a survival of the time when the officers were not of the same blood as the soldiers. These penalties were still retained in the republican armies. Brindamour, who became a general in 1792, employed the customs of bygone days in the service of the Revolution and shot volunteers

in grand style. At any rate, it may be said that Brindamour waged war and fought strenuously from the time that he became general. It was a matter of keeping the upper hand : it was not a man's life that was at stake, but the safety of the country."

"It was theft especially," said M. Mazure, "that the generals of the year II punished with relentless severity. A light-infantry man in the Army of the North, who had merely exchanged his old hat for a new one, was shot. Two drummers, the eldest of whom was only eighteen, were shot in sight of their comrades for having stolen some worthless ornaments from an old peasant. It was the heroic age."

"It was not only thieves," answered M. Bergeret, "who were shot down from day to day in the republican armies, it was also mutineers. And those soldiers, who have been so much belauded since, were dragooned like convicts, even to the point of semi-starvation. It is true that they were occasionally in an awkward mood. Witness the three hundred gunners of the 33rd demi-brigade who, at Mantua in the year IV, demanded their pay by turning their cannon on the generals.

"They were jolly dogs with whom jesting was not safe! If enemies were not come-at-able they were capable of spitting a dozen of their superior officers. Such is the heroic temperament. But

Dumanet is not a hero nowadays, since peace no longer produces such beings. Sergeant Bridoux has nothing to fear in his peaceful quarters, yet it pleases him to be still able to say that a man cannot raise a hand against him without being immediately shot with musical honours. However, in the present state of our manners and in time of peace, such a circumstance is out of proportion, although nobody can see it. It is true that when a sentence of death has been passed by court-martial it is never carried out, save in Algeria, and that, as far as possible, we avoid giving these martial and musical entertainments in France. It is recognised that here they would produce a bad effect: and in that fact you have a tacit condemnation of the military code."

"Take care," said M. de Terremondre, "lest you impair discipline in any way."

"If," answered M. Bergeret, "you had only seen a batch of raw recruits filing into the barrack yard, you would no longer think it necessary to be for ever hurling threats of death at these sheep-like creatures in order to maintain discipline among them. They are thinking of nothing but of how to get through their three years, as they put it, and Sergeant Bridoux would be touched even to tears by their pitiful docility, were it not that he thirsts to terrify them in order that he may

enjoy his own sense of power. It is not that Sergeant Bridoux was born with a more callous heart than anyone else. But he is doubly perverted, both as slave and tyrant, and if Marcus Aurelius had been a non-commissioned officer I would not go so far as to promise that he would never have tyrannised over his men. However that may be, this tyranny suffices to produce that submission tempered by deceit that is the soldier's most useful virtue in time of peace.

"It is high time that our military codes of law, with their paraphernalia of death, should be seen no more, save in the chamber of horrors, by the side of the keys of the Bastille and the thumb-screws of the Inquisition."

"Army affairs," said M. de Terremondre, "require most cautious handling. The army means safety and it means hope. It is also the training school of duty. Where else, save there, can be found self-sacrifice and devotion?"

"It is true," said M. Bergeret, "that men consider it the primary social duty to learn to kill their fellows according to rule, and that, in civilised nations, the glory of massacre is the greatest glory known. And, after all, though man may be irredeemably evil and mischievous, the bad work he does is but small in comparison with the whole

universe. For this planet is but a clod of earth in space and the sun but a gaseous bubble that will soon dissolve."

"I see," said M. Frémont, "that you are no positivist. For you treat the great fetich but scornfully."

"What is the great fetich?" asked M. de Terremondre.

"You know," answered M. Frémont, "that the positivists classify man as the worshipping animal. Auguste Comte was very anxious to provide for the wants of this worshipping animal and, after long reflection, supplied him with a fetich. But his choice fell on the earth and not on God. This was not because he was an atheist. On the contrary, he held that the existence of a creative power is quite probable. Only he opined that God was too difficult for comprehension, and therefore his disciples, who are very religious men, practise the worship of the dead, of great men, of woman, and of the great fetich, which is the earth. Hence it comes about that the followers of this cult make plans for the happiness of men and busy themselves in regulating the affairs of the planet with a view to our happiness."

"They will have a great deal to do," said M. Bergeret, "and it is quite evident that they are optimists. They must be optimistic to a

degree, and this temperament of theirs fills me with astonishment, for it is difficult to realise that intelligent and thoughtful men such as these can cherish the hope of some day making our sojourn on this petty ball bearable to us. For this earth, revolving clumsily round a yellow, half-darkened sun, carries us with it as though we were vermin on a mouldy crust. The great fetich does not seem to me in any way worshipful."

Dr. Fornerol stooped down to whisper in M. de Terremondre's ear :

"Bergeret wouldn't gird at the universe in this way if he hadn't some special trouble. It isn't natural to see the seamy side of everything."

"You're right," said M. de Terremondre.

XII

HE elm-trees on the Mall were slowly clothing their dusky limbs with a delicate drapery of pale gauzy green. But on the slope of the hill crowned with its ancient ramparts, the flowering trees of the orchards showed their round white heads, or distaffs of rosy bloom, against a background of cloudless, sunny sky that smiled between the showers. In the distance flowed the river, swollen with spring rains, a line of bare, white water, that fretted with its rounded curves the rows of slender poplars which outlined its course. Beautiful, invincible, fruitful and eternal, flowed the river, a true goddess, as in the days when the boatmen of Roman Gaul made their offerings of copper coins to it and raised, before the temple of Venus and Augustus, a votive pillar on which they had roughly carved a boat with its oars. Everywhere in this open valley, the sweet, trembling youth of the year shivered along the surface of the ancient earth. Under the elm-trees

on the Mall walked M. Bergeret with slow, irregular steps. As he wandered on, his mind glanced hither and thither; shifting it was and confused; old as the earth itself, yet young as the flowers on the apple-boughs; empty of thought, yet full of vague visions; lonely, yet full of desire; gentle, innocent, wanton, melancholy; dragging behind it a weight of weariness, yet still pursuing Hopes and Illusions whose very names, shapes and faces were unknown to him.

At last he drew near the wooden bench on which he was in the habit of sitting in summer time, at the hour when the birds are silent on the trees. Here, where he often sat resting with Abbé Lantaigne, under the beautiful elm that overheard all their grave talk, he saw that some words had been recently traced by a clumsy hand in chalk on the green back of the seat. At first he was seized with a fear lest he should find his own name written there, for it was quite familiar by now to all the blackguards of the town. But he soon saw that he need have no trouble on that score, since it was merely a lewd inscription in which Narcissus announced to the world the pleasures he had enjoyed on this very bench in the arms of his Ernestine, doubtless under cover of the kindly night. The style of the legend was simple and concise, but coarse and uncomely in its terms.

M. Bergeret was just about to sit down in his accustomed place, but he changed his mind, since it did not seem a fitting action for a decent man to lean publicly against this obscene memorial, dedicated to the Venus of cross-roads and gardens, especially as it stood on the very spot where he had expressed so many noble and ironic thoughts and had so often invoked the muse of seemly meditation. Turning away, therefore, from the bench, he said to himself:

"O vain desire for fame! We long to live in the memory of men, and unless we are consummately well-bred men of the world, we would fain publish in the market-place our loves, our joys, our sorrows and our hates. Narcissus, here, can only really believe that he has actually won his Ernestine, when all the world has heard of it. It was the same spirit that drove Phidias to trace a beloved name on the great toe of the Olympian Jove. O thirst of the soul to unburden itself, to plunge into the ocean of the not-self! '*To-day, on this bench, Narcissus* . . .'

"Yet," thought M. Bergeret once more, "the first virtue of civilised man and the corner-stone of society is dissimulation. It is just as incumbent on us to hide our thoughts as it is for us to wear clothes. A man who blurts out all his thoughts, just as they arise in his mind, is as inconceivable as

the spectacle of a man walking naked through a town. Talk in Paillot's shop is free enough, yet were I, for instance, to express all the fancies that crowd my mind at this moment, all the notions which pass through my head, like a swarm of witches riding on broomsticks down a chimney, if I were to describe the manner in which I suddenly see Madame de Gromance, the incongruous attitudes in which I picture her, the vision of her which comes to me, more ludicrous, more weird, more chimerical, more quaint, more monstrous, more perverted and alien to all seemly conventions, a thousand times more waggish and indecent than that famous figure introduced in the scene of the Last Judgment on the north portal of Saint-Exupère by a masterly craftsman who had caught a glimpse of Lust himself as he leant over a vent-hole of hell; if I were accurately to reveal the strangeness of my dream, it would be concluded that I am a prey to some repulsive mania. Yet, all the same, I know that I am an honourable man, naturally inclined to purity, disciplined by life and reflection to self-control, a modest man wholly dedicated to the peaceful pleasures of the mind, a foe to all excess, and hating vice as a deformity."

As he walked on, deep in this singular train of thought, M. Bergeret caught sight, along the Mall,

of Abbé Lantaigne, the principal of the high seminary, and Abbé Tabarit, the chaplain of the prison. The two were in close conversation and M. Tabarit was waggling his long body, with his little pointed head, while he emphasised his words by sweeping gestures of his bony arms. Abbé Lantaigne, with head erect and chest projecting, held his breviary under his arm and listened gravely with far-away gaze and lips locked tightly between stolid cheeks that were never distended by a smile.

M. Lantaigne answered M. Bergeret's bow by a gesture and a word of greeting :

"Stop, Monsieur Bergeret," he cried, "M. Tabarit is not afraid of infidels."

But the prison chaplain was not to be interrupted in the full tide of his thoughts.

"Who," said he, "could have remained unmoved at what I saw ? This lad has taught every one of us a lesson by the sincerity of his repentance, by the simple, truthful expression of the most Christian sentiments. His bearing, his looks, his words, his whole being spoke plainly enough of gentleness and humility, of utter submission to the will of God. He never ceased to offer a most consoling spectacle, a most salutary example. Perfect resignation, an awakened faith too long stifled in his heart, a supreme abasement before the God who

pardons: such were the blessed fruits of my exhortations."

The old man was moved with the easy earnestness of the blameless, buoyant, self-absorbed nature. Real grief stirred in his great, prominent eyes and his poor, meagre red nose. After a momentary sigh, he began again, this time turning towards M. Bergeret:

"Ah, sir," said he, "in the course of my painful ministry I have encountered many thorns. But also what fruit I find! Many times in the course of my long life have I snatched lost souls from the devil, who was on the alert to lay hold of them. But none of the poor creatures with whom I have journeyed to the gates of death presented such an edifying spectacle in their last moments as this young Lecœur."

"What!" cried M. Bergeret, "you surely are not speaking like this of the murderer of Madame Houssieu? Isn't it well known that——"

He was just going on to say that, according to the unanimous account of all those who had witnessed the execution, the poor wretch had been carried to the scaffold, already half dead with fear. He stopped short, however, lest he should afflict the old man, who continued in his own way:

"It is true that he made no long speeches and indulged in no noisy demonstrations. But if you

had only heard the sighs, the ejaculations, by which he testified to his repentance! In his melancholy journey from the prison to the place of expiation, when I reminded him of his mother and his first communion, he wept."

"Certainly," said M. Bergeret, "Madame Houssieu didn't die so edifyingly."

At these words M. Tabarit rolled his great eyes from east to west. He always sought for the solution of metaphysical problems, not within himself, but without, and whenever he fell into a day dream at table his old servant, misunderstanding his look, would inquire: "Are you looking for the cork of the bottle, sir? It's in your hand."

But M. Tabarit's roving glance had fallen on a great bearded man in cyclist's dress who was passing along the Mall. This was Eusèbe Boulet, editor in chief of the radical paper *le Phare*. Instantly M. Tabarit bade a hasty good-bye to the professor and the head of the seminary, and hurrying up to the journalist with great strides, wished him good-day. Then, with a face reddened by excitement, he drew some crumpled papers out of his pocket and handed them to him with a hand that trembled. These were rectifications and supplementary communications as to the last moments of young Lecœur. For at the end of his secluded

life and humble ministry, a passion for print, a thirst for interviews and articles, had come upon this holy man.

It was with something approaching a smile that M. Lantaigne watched the poor old fellow, with his quick, birdlike movements, handing up his scrawls to the radical editor.

"Look!" said he to M. Bergeret, "the miasma of this age has even infected a man who was marching deathwards by a path long paved with goodness and virtue. This old fellow, though he is humble and modest about everything else, is craving for notoriety. He yearns to appear in print at any cost, even though it be in the pages of an anti-clerical paper."

Then, vexed at having betrayed one of his own people to the enemy, M. Lantaigne added with a brisk air of indifference:

"Not much harm done. It's absurd, that's all."

Thereupon, relapsing into silence, he was his own gloomy self once more.

M. Lantaigne was a masterful man, and his will forced M. Bergeret towards their usual seat. Entirely indifferent to the vulgar phenomena by which the world outside themselves is manifested to the generality of men, he scorned to notice the lewd inscription of Narcissus and Ernestine, written in chalk in large running characters on the back of

the seat. Sinking down on the bench with a placid air of mental detachment, he covered a third of this inscribed memorial with his broad back. M. Bergeret sat down by M. Lantaigne's side, first, however, spreading out his newspaper over the back, so as to conceal that part of the text which seemed to him the most outspoken. In his estimation this was the verb—a word which, according to the grammarians, denotes the existence of an attribute to the subject. But inadvertently, he had merely substituted one inscription for another. The paper, in fact, announced in a side-note one of those episodes that have become so common in parliamentary life since the memorable triumph of democratic institutions. This spring the scandal period had come round once more with astronomical exactitude, following the change of the Seasons and the Dance of the Hours, and during the month several deputies had been prosecuted, according to custom. The sheet unfolded by M. Bergeret bore in huge letters this notice: "A Senator at Mazas. Arrest of M. Laprat-Teulet." Although there was nothing unusual about the fact itself, which merely indicated the regular working of the parliamentary machine, it struck M. Bergeret that there was perhaps an uncalled-for display of indifference in posting up this notice on a bench on the Mall, in the very shadow of those elms under

which the honourable M. Laprat-Teulet had so often been the recipient of the honours which democracy loves to bestow on her greatest citizens. Here on the Mall, M. Laprat-Teulet, sitting at the right hand of the President of the Republic, on a rostrum draped in ruby velvet beneath a trophy of flags, had, on different ceremonial occasions in honour of great local or national rejoicings, uttered those words which are so well calculated to exalt the blessings of government, while at the same time they recommend patience to the toiling and devoted masses. Laprat-Teulet, who had started as a republican, had now been for five-and-twenty years the powerful and highly respected leader of the opportunist party in the department. Now that his hair had grown white with age and parliamentary toil, he stood out in his native town like an oak adorned with tricoloured garlands. His enemies had been ruined and his friends enriched through his exertions and he was loaded with public honours. He was, moreover, not only august, but also affable, and every year at prize distributions, he spoke of his poverty to the little children : he could call himself poor without injuring himself in any way, for no one believed him, and everyone felt certain that he was very rich. The sources of his wealth, in fact, were well known, the thousand channels by means of which

his labour and his astuteness had drained off the money into his own pockets. They could calculate perfectly what funds had poured into his coffers from the undertakings that were based on his political credit and from all the concessions granted on account of his parliamentary interest. For he was a deputy with famous business capacities, a capital financial orator, and his friends knew, as well as, and even better, than his enemies, what he had pocketed through the Panama affair and similar enterprises. Very far-seeing, moderate in his desires and, above all, anxious not to tempt fortune too far, this great guardian of our industrious and intelligent democracy had given up high finance for the last ten years, thus bowing before the first breath of the storm. He had even left the Palais-Bourbon and retired to the Luxembourg, to that great Council of the Commons of France where his wisdom and devotion to the Republic were duly appreciated. There he was able to pull the strings without being seen by the public. He only spoke on secret commissions. But there he still showed those brilliant qualities which for many years the princes of cosmopolitan finance had justly learnt to appraise at a high value. He remained the outspoken defender of the fiscal system introduced at the Revolution and founded, as we are all aware, on the principles of liberty

and justice. He upheld the rights of capital with that emotion which is always so touching in an old hand at the game. Even the turn-coats themselves revered in the person of Laprat-Teulet a pacific and truly conservative mind, regarding him as the guardian angel of personal property.

"His notions are honourable enough," said M. de Terremondre. "But the worst aspect of it is that to-day he is burdened with the weight of a difficult past." But Laprat-Teulet had enemies who were implacable in their hatred of him. "I have earned this hatred," said he magnanimously, "by defending the interests which were entrusted to me."

His enemies pursued him even into the sacred precincts of the Senate, where his misfortunes gave him an air of still greater dignity, for he had once before been in difficulties and even actually on the verge of ruin. This came about through a mistake made by a Keeper of the Seals who was not a member of the syndicate and who had rashly handed him over into the astonished hands of justice. Neither the honourable M. Laprat-Teulet, nor his examining judge, nor his barrister, nor the Public Prosecutor, nor the Keeper of the Seals himself, was capable of foreseeing, or even understanding, the cause of those sudden partial cleavages in the machine of government, those catastrophes,

farcical as the collapse of a platform at a show and terrible as the outcome of what the orator called immanent justice, catastrophes which sometimes hurl the most respected statesmen from their seats in both Chambers. M. Laprat-Teulet felt a melancholy surprise at his fate and he scorned to give any explanation to the authorities, but the number and splendour of his connections saved him. A plea that there was not sufficient cause for prosecution was interposed. At first Laprat-Teulet accepted it with humble gratitude, and next he bore it into the official world as a regular certificate of innocence. "Almighty God," said Madame Laprat-Teulet, who was pious, "Almighty God has been very merciful to my husband, for to him He has granted the stay of proceedings he so much desired." It is matter of common knowledge that Madame Laprat-Teulet was so grateful that she had a votive-offering hung up in the chapel of Saint-Antoine, a marble slab bearing the following inscription: "From a Christian wife, in gratitude for an unhoped-for blessing."

This stay of proceedings reassured Laprat-Teulet's political friends, the crowd of ex-ministers and big officials who had shared with him, not only the time of struggle, but the fruitful years, who had known both the seven lean kine and the seven fat kine. This stay was a safeguard, or at

any rate was regarded as such. It could be relied upon for several years to come. Then suddenly, by a stroke of bad luck, by one of those ill-omened and unforeseen accidents that come secretly and from underneath, like sudden leaks in rotten vessels, without any political or moral reason, in the full glory of his honours, this old servant of the democracy, this heir of its achievements whom M. Worms-Clavelin had instanced only the night before in the comitia as a shining light to the whole department, this man of order and progress, this defender of capital and opponent of clericalism, this intimate friend of ex-ministers and ex-presidents, this Senator Laprat-Teulet, this man, though exculpated on the former occasion, was sent to prison with a batch of members of parliament. And the local paper announced in large type: "A Senator at Mazas. Arrest of M. Laprat-Teulet." M. Bergeret, being a man of delicacy, turned the paper round on the back of the seat.

"Well," said M. Lantaigne in a morose voice, "do you like the look of what you see there, and do you think it can last long?"

"What do you mean?" asked M. Bergeret. "Are you referring to the parliamentary scandals? But let us first ask what a scandal really is. A scandal is the effect that usually results from the revelation of some secret deed. For men don't in

general act furtively, save when they are doing something that runs counter to morality and public opinion. It is also noticeable that, although public scandals occur in every period and every nation, they happen most frequently when the Government is least skilled in dissimulation. It is also evident that state secrets are never well kept in a democracy. The number of people concerned, indeed, and the powerful party jealousies invite revelations, sometimes hushed up, sometimes startling. It should also be observed that the parliamentary system actually multiplies the number of those who betray trusts, by putting a crowd of people in a position where they can do it easily. Louis XIV was robbed by Fouquet on a large and splendid scale. But in our days, all the while the melancholy President, who had been chosen merely as a creditable figure-head, confronted the chastened departments with the mute countenance of a bearded Minerva, he was distributing largesse at the Palais Bourbon at a rate past checking. In itself this was no great evil, for every Government always has a number of needy folks hanging about it, and it is too much to demand of human nature to ask that they shall all be honest. Besides, what these paltry thieves have taken is very little in comparison with what our honest administration wastes every hour of the day. One point alone should

be observed, for it is of primary importance. The revenue farmers of olden days, this Pauquet de Sainte-Croix, for instance, who in the time of Louis XV heaped up the wealth of the province in the very mansion where I now live 'in the third room,' those shameless plunderers robbed their nation and their king without being in collusion with any of their country's enemies. Now, on the contrary, our parliamentary sharks are betraying France to a foreign power, Finance, to wit. For it is true that Finance is to-day one of the Powers of Europe, and of her it may be said, as was formerly said of the Church, that among the nations she remains a splendid alien. Our representatives, whom she buys over, are not only robbers but traitors. And, in truth, they rob and betray in paltry, huckstering fashion. Each one in himself is merely an object of pity: it is their rapid swarming that alarms me.

"Meanwhile the honourable M. Laprat-Teulet is at Mazas! He was taken there on the morning of the very day on which he was due here to preside over the Social Defence League banquet. This arrest, which was carried out on the day after the vote that authorised the prosecution, has taken M. Worms-Clavelin completely by surprise. He had arranged for M. Dellion to preside at the banquet, since his integrity, guaranteed by inherited wealth

and by forty years of commercial prosperity, is universally respected. Though the *préfet* deplores the fact that the most prominent officials of the Republic are continually subject to suspicion, yet, at the same time, he congratulates himself on the loyalty of their constituents, who remain true to the established system, even when it seems the general wish to bring it into disrepute. He declares, in fact, that parliamentary episodes such as the one which has just occurred, even when they follow on others of the same kind, leave the working-classes of the department absolutely indifferent. And M. Worms-Clavelin is quite right: he is by no means exaggerating the phlegmatic calm of these classes, which seem no longer capable of surprise. The herd of nobodies read in the newspapers that Senator Laprat-Teulet has been sent to solitary confinement; they manifest no surprise at the news, and they would have received with the same phlegm the information that he had been sent as ambassador to some foreign court. It is even probable that, if the arm of justice sends him back to parliamentary life, M. Laprat-Teulet will sit next year on the budget commission. There is, at any rate, no doubt whatever that at the end of his sentence he will be re-elected."

The abbé here interrupted M. Bergeret.

"There, Monsieur Bergeret, you put your finger

on the weak point; there you make the void to echo. The public is becoming used to the spectacle of wrong-doing and is losing the power to discriminate between good and evil. That's where the danger lies. Now one public scandal after another arises, only to be at once hushed up. Under the Monarchy and the Empire there was such a thing as public opinion; there is none to-day. This nation, once so high-spirited and generous, has suddenly become incapable of either hatred or love, of either admiration or scorn."

"Like you," said M. Bergeret, "I have been struck by this change and I have sought in vain for the causes of it. We read in many Chinese fables of a very ugly spirit, of lumpish gait, but subtle mind, who loves to play pranks. He makes his way by night into inhabited houses, then opening a sleeper's brain, as though it were a box, he takes out the brain, puts another in its place and softly closes the skull. He takes infinite delight in passing thus from house to house, interchanging brains as he goes, and when, at dawn, this tricksy elf has returned to his temple, the mandarin awakes with the mind of a courtesan, and the young girl with the dreams of a hardened opium-eater. Some spirit of this sort must assuredly have been busy bartering French brains for those of some tame, spiritless people, who drag out a melancholy existence without

rising to the height of a new desire, indifferent alike to justice and injustice. For, indeed, we are no longer at all like ourselves."

Stopping suddenly, M. Bergeret shrugged his shoulders. Then he went on, in a tone of gentle sadness :

"Yet, it is the effect of age and the sign of a certain wisdom. Infancy is the age of awe and wonder ; youth, of fiery revolt. It is the mere passing of the years that has brought us this mood of peaceful indifference : I ought to have understood it better. Our condition of mind, at any rate, assures us both internal and external peace."

"Do you think so?" asked Abbé Lantaigne. "And have you no presentiment of approaching catastrophe?"

"Life in itself is a catastrophe," answered M. Bergeret. "It is a constant catastrophe, in fact, since it can only manifest itself in an unstable environment, and since the essential condition of its existence is the instability of the forces which produce it. The life of a nation, like that of an individual, is a never-ceasing ruin, a series of downfalls, an endless prospect of misery and crime. Our country, though it is the finest in the world, only exists, like others, by the perpetual renewal of its miseries and mistakes. To live is to destroy. To act is to injure. But at this par-

ticular moment, Monsieur Lantaigne, the finest country in the world is feeble in action, and plays but a sluggard's part in the drama of existence. It is that fact which reassures me, for I detect no signs in the heavens. I foresee no evils approaching with special and peculiar menace to our peaceful land. Tell me, Monsieur l'abbé, when you foretell catastrophe, is it from within or from without that you see it coming?"

"The danger is all round us," answered M. Lantaigne, "and yet you laugh."

"I feel no desire whatever to laugh," answered M. Bergeret. "There is little enough for me to laugh at in this sublunary world, on this terrestrial globe whose inhabitants are almost all either hateful or ridiculous. But I do not believe that either our peace or our independence is threatened by any powerful neighbour. We inconvenience no one. We are not a menace to the comity of nations. We are restrained and reasonable. So far as we know, our statesmen are not formulating extravagant schemes which, if successful, would establish our power, or if unsuccessful, would bring about our ruin. We make no claim to the sovereignty of the globe. Europe of to-day finds us quite bearable: the feeling must be a happy novelty.

"Just look for a moment at the portraits of our

statesmen that Madame Fusellier, the stationer, keeps in her shop-window. Tell me if there is a single one of them who looks as if he were made to unleash the dogs of war and lay the world waste. Their talents match their power, for both are but mediocre. They are not made to be the perpetrators of great crimes, for, thank God! they are not great men. Hence, we can sleep in peace. Besides, although Europe is armed to the teeth, I believe she is by no means inclined to war. For in war there breathes a generous spirit unpopular nowadays. True, they set the Turks fighting the Greeks: that is, they bet on them, as men bet on cocks or horses. But they will not fight between themselves. In 1840 Auguste Comte foretold the end of war and, of course, the prophecy was not exactly and literally fulfilled. Yet possibly the vision of this great man penetrated into the far-distant future. War is, indeed, the everyday condition of a feudal and monarchical Europe, but the feudal system is now dead and the ancient despotisms are opposed by new forces. The question of peace or war in our days depends less on absolute sovereigns than on the great international banking interests, more influential than the Powers themselves. Financial Europe is in a peaceful temper, or, if that be not quite true, she certainly has no love for war as

war, no respect for any sentiment of chivalry. Besides, her barren influence is not destined to live long and she will one day be engulfed in the abyss of industrial revolution. Socialistic Europe will probably be friendly to peace, for there will be a socialistic Europe, Monsieur Lantaigne, if indeed that unknown power which is approaching can be rightly called Socialism."

"Sir," answered Abbé Lantaigne, "only one Europe is possible, and that is Christian Europe. There will always be wars, for peace is not ordained for this world. If only we could recover the courage and faith of our ancestors! As a soldier of the Church militant, I know well that war will only end with the consummation of the ages. And, like Ajax in old Homer, I pray God that I may fight in the light of day. What terrifies me is neither the number nor the boldness of our enemies, but the weakness and indecision which prevail in our own camp. The Church is an army, and I grieve when I see chasms and openings right along her battle-front; I rage when I see atheists slipping into her ranks and the worshippers of the Golden Calf volunteering for the defence of the sanctuary. I groan when I see the struggle going on all around me, amidst the confusion of a great darkness propitious to cowards and traitors. The will of God be done! I am certain of the final

triumph, of the ultimate conquest of sin and error at the last day, which will be the day of glory and justice."

He rose with firm and steady glance, yet his heavy face was downcast. His soul within him was sorrowful, and not without good reason. For under his administration the high seminary was on its way to ruin. There was a financial deficit, and now that he was being prosecuted by Lafolie the butcher, to whom he owed ten thousand, two hundred and thirty-one francs, his pride lived in perpetual dread of a rebuke from the Cardinal-Archbishop. The mitre towards which he had stretched out his hand was eluding his grasp and already he saw himself banished to some poor country benefice. Turning towards M. Bergeret, he said :

"The most terrible storm-cloud is ready to burst over France."

XIII

UST now M. Bergeret was on his way to the restaurant, for every evening he spent an hour at the Café de la Comédie. Everybody blamed him for doing so, but here he could enjoy a cheery warmth which had nothing to do with wedded bliss. Here, too, he could read the papers and look on the faces of people who bore him no ill-will. Sometimes, too, he met M. Goubin here—M. Goubin, who had become his favourite pupil since M. Roux's treachery. M. Bergeret had his favourites, for the simple reason that his artistic soul took pleasure in the very act of making a choice. He had a partiality for M. Goubin, though he could scarcely be said to love him, and, as a matter of fact, M. Goubin was not lovable. Thin and lank, poverty-stricken in physique, in hair, in voice, and in brain, his weak eyes hidden by eye-glasses, his lips close-locked, he was petty in every way, and endowed, not only with the foot, but with the mind of a young girl. Yet, with

these characteristics, he was accurate and painstaking, and to his puny frame had been fitted vast and powerful protruding ears, the only riches with which nature had blessed this feeble organism. M. Goubin was naturally qualified to be a capital listener.

M. Bergeret was in the habit of talking to M. Goubin, while they sat with two large beer-glasses in front of them, amidst the noise of the dominoes clicking on the marble tables all around them. At eleven o'clock the master rose and the pupil followed his example. Then they walked across the empty Place du Théâtre and by back ways until they reached the gloomy Tintelleries.

In such fashion they proceeded one night in May when the air, which had been cleared by a heavy storm of rain, was fresh and limpid and full of the smell of earth and leaves. In the purple depths of the moonless, cloudless sky hung points of light that sparkled with the white gleam of diamonds. Amid them, here and there, twinkled bright facets of red or blue. Lifting his eyes to the sky, M. Bergeret watched the stars. He knew the constellations fairly well, and, with his hat on the back of his head and his face turned upwards, he pointed out Gemini with the end of his stick to the vague, wandering glance of M. Goubin's ignorance. Then he murmured :

"Would that the clear star of Helen's twin brothers
Might 'neath thy barque the wild waters assuage,
Would that to Pœstum o'er seas of Ionia . . ."[1]

Then he said abruptly:

"Have you heard, Monsieur Goubin, that news of Venus has reached us from America and that the news is bad?"

M. Goubin tried obediently to look for Venus in the sky, but the professor informed him that she had set.

"That beautiful star," he continued, "is a hell of fire and ice. I have it from M. Camille Flammarion himself, who tells me every month, in the excellent articles he writes, all the news from the sky. Venus always turns the same side to the sun, as the moon does to the earth. The astronomer at Mount Hamilton swears that it is so. If we pin our faith to him, one of the hemispheres of Venus is a burning desert, the other, a waste of ice and darkness, and that glorious luminary of our evenings and mornings is filled with naught but silence and death."

"Really!" said M. Goubin.

"Such is the prevailing creed this year," answered M. Bergeret. "For my part, I am not far

[1] "Oh! soit que l'astre pur des deux frères d'Hélène
Calme sous ton vaisseau la vague ionienne,
Soit qu'aux bords de Pœstum . . ."

from being convinced that life, at any rate in the form which it presents on earth, is the result of a disease in the constitution of the planet, that it is a morbid growth, a leprosy, something loathsome, in fact, which would never be found in a healthy, well-constituted star. By life I mean, of course, that state of activity manifested by organic matter in plants and animals. I derive pleasure and consolation from this idea. For, indeed, it is a melancholy thing to fancy that all these suns that flame above our heads bring warmth to other planets as miserable as our own, and that the universe gives birth to suffering and squalor in never-ending succession.

"We cannot speak of the planets attendant on Sirius or Aldebaran, on Altaïr or Vega, of those dark masses of dust that may perchance accompany these points of fire that lie scattered over the sky, for even that they exist is not known to us, and we only suspect it by virtue of the analogy existing between our sun and the other stars of the universe. But if we try to form some conception of the planets in our own system, we cannot possibly imagine that life exists there in the mean forms which she usually presents on our earth. One cannot suppose that beings constructed on our model are to be found in the weltering chaos of the giants Saturn and Jupiter. Uranus and

Neptune have neither light nor heat, and therefore that form of corruption which we call organic life cannot exist on them. Neither is it credible that life can be manifested in that star-dust dispersed in the ether between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter, for that dust is but the scattered material of a planet. The tiny ball Mercury seems too blazing hot to produce that mouldy dampness which we call animal and vegetable life. The moon is a dead world, and we have just discovered that the temperature of Venus does not suit what we call organic life. Thus, we can imagine nothing at all comparable with man in all the solar system, unless it be on the planet Mars, which, unfortunately for itself, has some points in common with the earth. It has both air and water; it has, alas! maybe, the materials for the making of animals like ourselves."

"Isn't it true that it is believed to be inhabited?" asked M. Goubin.

"We have sometimes been disposed to imagine so," answered M. Bergeret. "The appearance of this planet is not very well known to us. It seems to vary and to be always in confusion. On it canals can be seen, whose nature and origin we cannot understand. We cannot be absolutely certain that this neighbour of ours is saddened and degraded by human beings like ourselves."

M. Bergeret had reached his door. He stopped and said :

"I would fain believe that organic life is an evil peculiar to this wretched little planet of ours. It is a ghastly idea that in the infinitude of heaven they eat and are eaten in endless succession."

XIV

THE cab which was carrying Madame Worms-Clavelin into Paris passed through the Porte Maillot between the gratings crowned in civic style with a hedge of pike-heads. Near these lay dusty custom-house officers and sunburnt flower-girls asleep in the sun. As it passed, it left, on the right, the Avenue de la Révolte, where low, mouldy, red-bedaubed inns and stunted arbours face the Chapel of Saint-Ferdinand, which crouches, lonely and dwarfish, on the edge of a gloomy military moat covered with sickly patches of scorched grass. Thence it emerged into the melancholy Rue de Chartres, with its everlasting pall of dust from the stone-cutting yards, and passed down it into the beautiful shady roads that open into the royal park, now cut up into small, middle-class estates. As the cab rumbled heavily along the causeway down an avenue of plane-trees, every second or so, through the silent solitude, there

passed lightly-clad bicyclists who skimmed by with bent backs and heads cutting the air like quick-moving animals. With their rapid flight and long, swift, bird-like movements, they were almost graceful through sheer ease, almost beautiful by the mere amplitude of the curves they described. Between the bordering tree-trunks Madame Worms-Clavelin could see lawns, little ponds, steps, and glass-door canopies in the most correct taste, cut off by rows of palings. Then she lost herself in a vague dream of how, in her old age, she would live in a house like those whose fresh plaster and slate she could see through the leaves. She was a sensible woman and moderate in her desires, so that now she felt a dawning love of fowls and rabbits rising in her breast. Here and there, in the larger avenues, big buildings stood out, chapels, schools, asylums, hospitals, an Anglican church with its gables of stern Gothic, religious houses, severely peaceful in appearance, with a cross on the gate and a very black bell against the wall and, hanging down, the chain by which to ring it. Then the cab plunged into the low-lying, deserted region of market-gardens, where the glass roofs of hot-houses glittered at the end of narrow, sandy paths, or where the eye was caught by the sudden appearance of one of those ridiculous summer-houses that country builders delight to construct, or by the

trunks of dead trees imitated in stoneware by an ingenious maker of garden ornaments. In this Bas-Neuilly district one can feel the freshness of the river hard by. Vapours rise there from a soil that is still damp with the waters which covered it, up to quite a late period, according to the geologists—exhalations from marshes on which the wind bent the reeds scarcely a thousand or fifteen hundred years ago.

Madame Worms-Clavelin looked out of the carriage window: she had nearly arrived. In front of her the pointed tops of the poplars which fringe the river rose at the end of the avenue. Once more the surroundings were varied and bustling. High walls and zigzag roof-ridges followed one another uninterruptedly. The cab stopped in front of a large modern house, evidently built with special regard to economy and even stinginess, in defiance of all considerations of art or beauty. Yet the effect was neat and pleasant on the whole. It was pierced with narrow windows, among which one could distinguish those of the chapel by the leaden tracery that bound the window-panes. On its dull, plain façade one was discreetly reminded of the traditions of French religious art by means of triangular dormer windows set in the woodwork of the roof and capped with trefoils. On the pediment of the front door an

ampulla was carved, typifying the phial in which was contained the blood of the Saviour that Joseph of Arimathæa had carried away in a glove. This was the escutcheon of the Sisters of the Precious Blood, a confraternity founded in 1829 by Madame Marie Latreille, which received state recognition in 1868, thanks to the goodwill of the Empress Eugénie. The Sisters of the Precious Blood devoted themselves to the training of young girls.

Jumping from the carriage, Madame Worms-Clavelin rang at the door, which was carefully and circumspectly half opened for her. Then she went into the parlour, while the sister who attended to the turnstile gave notice through the wicket that Mademoiselle de Clavelin was wanted to come and see her mother. The parlour was only furnished with horsehair chairs. In a niche on the white-washed wall there stood a figure of the Holy Virgin, painted in pale colours. There was a certain air of archness about the figure, which stood erect, with the feet hidden and the hands extended. This large, cold, white room carried with it a suggestion of peace, order and rectitude. One could feel in it a secret power, a social force that remained unseen.

Madame Worms-Clavelin sniffed the air of this parlour with a solemn sense of satisfaction, though

it was damp, and suffused with the stale smell of cooking. Her own girlhood had been spent in the noisy little schools of Montmartre, amidst daubs of ink and lumps of sweetmeats, and in the perpetual interchange of offensive words and vulgar gestures. She therefore appreciated very highly the austerity of an aristocratic and religious education. In order that her daughter might be admitted into a famous convent, she had had her baptized, for she thought to herself, "Jeanne will then be better bred and she will have a chance of making a better marriage."

Jeanne had accordingly been baptized at the age of eleven and with the utmost secrecy, because they were then under a radical administration. Since then the Church and the Republic had become more reconciled to each other, but in order to avoid displeasing the bigots of the department, Madame Worms-Clavelin still concealed the fact that her daughter was being educated in a nunnery. Somehow, however, the secret leaked out, and now and then the clerical organ of the department published a paragraph which M. Lacarelle, counsel to the prefecture, blue-pencilled and sent to M. Worms-Clavelin. For instance, M. Worms-Clavelin read :

"Is it a fact that the Jewish persecutor whom the freemasons have placed at the head of our departmental administration, in order that he may oppose the cause of

God among the faithful, has actually sent his daughter to be educated in a convent?"

M. Worms-Clavelin shrugged his shoulders and threw the paper into the waste-paper basket. Two days later the Catholic editor inserted another paragraph, as, after reading the first, one would have prophesied his doing.

"I asked whether our Jewish *préfet*, Worms-Clavelin, was really having his daughter educated in a convent. And now that this freemason has, for good reasons of his own, avoided giving me any answer, I will myself reply to my own question. After having had his daughter baptized, this dishonourable Jew sent his daughter to a Catholic place of education.

"*Mademoiselle Worms-Clavelin is at Neuilly-sur-Seine, being educated by the Sisters of the Precious Blood.*

"What a pleasure it is to witness the sincerity of jesters like these!

"A lay, atheistic, homicidal education is good enough for the people who maintain them! Would that our people's eyes were opened to discern on which side are the Tartuffes!"

M. Lacarelle, the counsel to the prefecture, first blue-pencilled the paragraph and then placed the open sheet on the *préfet's* desk. M. Worms-Clavelin threw it into his waste-paper basket and warned the meddlesome papers not to engage in discussions of that sort. Hence this little episode was soon forgotten and fell into the bottomless pit of oblivion, into that black darkness of night which,

after one outburst of excitement, swallows up the shame and the honour, the scandals and the glories of an administration. In view of the wealth and power of the Church, Madame Worms-Clavelin had stuck energetically to her point that Jeanne should be left to these nuns who would train the young girl in good principles and good manners.

She modestly sat down, hiding her feet under her dress, like the red, white and blue Virgin of the niche, and holding in her finger-tips by the string the box of chocolates she had brought for Jeanne.

A tall girl, looking very lanky in her black dress with the red girdle of the Middle School, burst into the room.

"Good morning, mamma!"

Madame Worms-Clavelin looked her up and down with a curious mixture of motherly solicitude and horse-dealer's curiosity. Drawing her close, she glanced at her teeth, made her stand upright; looked at her figure, her shoulders and her back, and seemed pleased.

"Heavens! how tall you are!" she exclaimed. "You have such long arms! . . ."

"Don't worry me about them, mamma! As it is, I never know what to do with them."

She sat down and clasped her red hands across

her knees. She replied with a graceful air of boredom to the questions which her mother asked about her health, and listened wearily to her instructions about healthy habits and to her advice in the matter of cod-liver oil. Then she asked :

"And how is papa?"

Madame Worms-Clavelin was almost astonished whenever anyone asked her about her husband, not because she was herself indifferent to him, but because she felt it was impossible to say anything new about this firm, unchangeable, stolid man, who was never ill and who never said or did anything original.

"Your father? What could happen to him? We have a very good position and no wish to change it."

All the same, she thought it would soon be advisable to look out for a suitable sinecure, either in the treasury, or, perhaps rather, in the Council of State. At the thought her beautiful eyes grew dim with reverie.

Her daughter asked what she was thinking about.

"I was thinking that one day we might return to Paris. I like Paris for my part, but there we should hardly count."

"Yet papa has great abilities. Sister Sainte-

Marie-des-Anges said so once in class. She said : 'Mademoiselle de Clavelin, your father has shown great administrative talents.'"

Madame Worms-Clavelin shook her head. "One wants so much money to live in style in Paris."

"You like Paris, mamma, but for my part I like the country best."

"You know nothing about it, pet."

"But, mamma, one doesn't care only for what one knows."

"There is, perhaps, some truth in what you say."

"You haven't heard, mamma? . . . I have won the prize for history composition. Madame de Saint-Joseph said I was the only one who had treated the subject thoroughly."

Madame Worms-Clavelin asked gently :

"What subject?"

"The Pragmatic Sanction."

Madame Worms-Clavelin asked, this time with an accent of real surprise :

"What is that?"

"It was one of Charles VII's mistakes. It was, indeed, the greatest mistake he ever made."

Madame Worms-Clavelin found this answer by no means enlightening. But since she took no

interest in the history of the Middle Ages, she was willing to let the matter drop. But Jeanne, who was full of her subject, went on in all seriousness :

"Yes, mamma. It was the greatest crime of that reign, a flagrant violation of the rights of the Holy See, a criminal robbery of the inheritance of St. Peter. But happily the error was set right by Francis I. And whilst we are on this subject, mamma, do you know we have found out that Alice's governess was an old wanton? . . ."

Madame Worms-Clavelin begged her daughter anxiously and earnestly not to join her young friends in research work of this kind. Then she flew into a rage :

"You are perfectly absurd, Jeanne, for you use words without paying any heed . . ."

Jeanne looked at her in mysterious silence. Then she said suddenly :

"Mamma, I must tell you that my drawers are in such a state that they are a positive sight. You know you have never been overwhelmingly interested in the question of linen. I don't say this as a reproach, for one person goes in for linen, another for dresses, another for jewels. You, mamma, have always gone in for jewels. For my part it's linen that I'm mad about. . . . And

besides, we've just had a nine days' prayer. I prayed hard both for you and for papa, I can tell you! And, then, I've earned four thousand nine hundred and thirty-seven days of indulgence."

XV

"I AM rather religiously inclined," said M. de Terremondre, "but I still think that the words spoken in Notre Dame by Père Ollivier were ill advised. And that is the general opinion."

"Of course," replied M. Lantaigne, "you blame him for having explained this disaster as a lesson given by God against pride and infidelity. You think him wrong in describing the favoured people as being suddenly punished for their faithlessness and rebellion. Ought one, then, to give up attempting to trace a cause for such terrible events?"

"There are," answered M. de Terremondre, "certain conventions which ought to be observed. The mere fact that the head of the State was present made a certain reserve incumbent on him."

"It is true," said M. Lantaigne, "that this monk actually dared to declare before the Presi-

dent and the ministers of the Republic, and before the rich and powerful, who are either the authors or accomplices of our shame, that France had failed in her age-long vocation, when she turned her back on the Christians of the East who were being massacred by thousands, and, like a coward, supported the Crescent against the Cross. He dared to declare that this once Christian nation had driven the true God from both its schools and its councils. This is the speech that you consider a crime, you, Monsieur de Terremondre, one of the leaders of the Catholic party in our department."

M. de Terremondre protested that he was deeply devoted to the interests of religion, but he still persisted in the opinion he had first held. In the first place, he was not for the Greeks, but for the Turks, or, if he could not go so far as that, he was at least for peace and order. And he knew many Catholics who regarded the Eastern Church with absolute indifference. Ought one, then, to give offence to them by attacking perfectly lawful convictions? It is not incumbent on everyone to be friendly towards Greece. The Pope, for one, is not.

"I have listened, M. Lantaigne," said he, "with all the deference in the world to your opinions. But I still think one ought to use a more

conciliatory style when one has to preach on a day which was one of mourning and yet, at the same time, one full of a hope that bade fair to bring about the reconciliation of opposing classes. . . ."

"Especially while stocks are going up, thus proving the wisdom of the course pursued by France and Europe on the Eastern question," added M. Bergeret, with a malicious laugh.

"Exactly so," answered M. de Terremondre. "A Government which fights the Socialists and in which religious and conservative ideas have made an undeniable advance ought to be treated with respect. Our *préfet*, M. Worms-Clavelin, although he is both a Jew and a freemason, shows keen anxiety to protect the rights of the Church. Madame Worms-Clavelin has not only had her daughter baptized, but has sent her to a Parisian convent, where she is receiving an excellent education. I know this to be the case, for Mademoiselle Jeanne Clavelin is in the same class as my nieces, the d'Ansey girls. Madame Worms-Clavelin is patroness of several of our institutions, and in spite of her origin and her official position, she scarcely attempts the slightest concealment of her aristocratic and religious sympathies."

"I don't doubt what you say in the least," said

M. Bergeret, "and you might even go so far as to say that at the present time French Catholicism has no stronger support than among the rich Jews."

"You are not far wrong," answered M. de Terremondre. "The Jews give generously in support of Catholic charities. . . . But the shocking part of Père Ollivier's sermon is that he was ready, as it were, to imply that God Himself was the original author and inspirer of this disaster. According to his words, it would seem that the God of mercy Himself actually set fire to the bazaar. My aunt d'Ansey, who was present at the service, came away in a great state of indignation. I feel sure, Monsieur l'abbé, that you cannot approve of such errors as these."

Usually M. Lantaigne refused to rush into random theological discussions with worldly-minded people who knew nothing about the subject, and although he was an ardent controversialist, his priestly habit of mind deterred him from engaging in disputes on frivolous occasions, such as the present one. He therefore remained silent, and it was M. Bergeret who replied to M. de Terremondre :

"You would have preferred then," said he, "that this monk should make excuses for a merciful God who had carelessly allowed a disaster

to happen in a badly-inspected point in His creation. You think that he should have ascribed to the Almighty the sad, regretful, and chastened attitude of a police inspector who has made a mistake."

"You are making fun of me now," said M. de Terremondre. "But was it really necessary to talk about expiatory victims and the destroying angel? Surely these are ideas that belong to a past age?"

"They are Christian ideas," said M. Bergeret. "M. Lantaigne won't deny that."

But as the priest was still silent, M. Bergeret continued:

"I advise you to read, in a book of whose teaching M. Lantaigne approves, in the famous *Essai sur l'indifférence*, a certain theory of expiation. I remember one sentence in it which I can quote almost verbatim: "We are ruled," said Lamennais, "by one law of destiny, an inexorable law whose tyranny we can never avoid: this law is expiation, the unbending axis of the moral world on which turns the whole destiny of humanity."

"That may be so," said M. de Terremondre. "But is it possible that God can have actually willed to aim a blow at honourable and charitable women like my cousin Courtrai and my

nieces Laneux and Felissay, who were terribly burnt in this fire? God is neither cruel nor unjust."

M. Lantaigne gripped his breviary under his left arm and made a movement as if to go away. Then, changing his mind, he turned towards M. de Terremondre and lifting his right hand said solemnly:

"God was neither cruel nor unjust towards these women when, in His mercy, He made them sacrificial offerings and types of the Victim without stain or spot. But since even Christians have lost, not only the sentiment of sacrifice, but also the practice of contrition, since they have become utterly ignorant of the most holy mysteries of religion, before we utterly despair of their salvation, we must expect warnings still more terrible, admonitions still more urgent, portents of still greater significance. Good-bye, Monsieur de Terremondre. I leave you with M. Bergeret, who, having no religion at all, at any rate avoids the misery and shame of an easy-going faith, and who will play at the game of refuting your arguments with the feeble resources of the intellect unsupported by the instincts of the heart."

When he had finished his speech, he walked away with a firm, stiff gait.

"What is the matter with him?" said M. de

Terremondre, as he looked after him. "I believe he has a grudge against me. He is very difficult to get on with, although he is a man worthy of all respect. The incessant disputes he engages in have soured his temper and he is at loggerheads with his Archbishop, with the professors at the college, and with half the clergy in the diocese. It is more than doubtful if he will get the bishopric, and I really begin to think that, for the Church's sake, as well as for his own, it is better to leave him where he is. His intolerance would make him a dangerous bishop. What a strange notion to approve of Père Ollivier's sermon!"

"I also approve of his sermon," said M. Bergeret.

"It's quite a different matter in your case," said M. de Terremondre. "You are merely amusing yourself. You are not a religious man."

"I am not religious," said M. Bergeret, "but I am a theologian."

"On my side," said M. de Terremondre, "it may be said that I am religious, but not a theologian; and I am revolted when I hear it said in the pulpit that God destroyed some poor women by fire, in order that He might punish our country for her crimes, inasmuch as she no longer takes the lead in Europe. Does Père Ollivier really believe that,

as things now are, it is so very easy to take the lead in Europe?"

"He would make a great mistake if he did believe it," said M. Bergeret. "But you are, as you have just been told, one of the leading members of the Catholic party in the department, and therefore you ought to know that your God used in Biblical times to show a lively taste for human sacrifices and that He rejoiced in the smell of blood. Massacre was one of His chief joys, and He particularly revelled in extermination. Such was His character, Monsieur de Terremondre. He was as bloodthirsty as M. de Gromance, who, from the beginning of the year to the end, spends his time in shooting deer, partridges, rabbits, quails, wild ducks, pheasants, grouse and cuckoos —all according to the season. So God sacrificed the innocent and the guilty, warriors and virgins, fur and feather. It even appears that He savoured the blood of Jephthah's daughter with delight."

"There you are wrong," said M. de Terremondre. "It is true that she was dedicated to Him, but that was not a sacrifice of blood."

"They argue so, I know," said M. Bergeret; "but that is just out of regard for your sensitiveness. But, as a matter of actual fact, she was butchered, and Jehovah showed Himself a regular

epicure for fresh meat. Little Joas, who had been brought up in the temple, knew perfectly well the way in which this God showed His love for children, and when good Jehosheba began to try on him the kingly fillet, he was much disturbed, and asked this pointed question :

'Must then a holocaust to-day be offered,
And must I now, as once did Jephthah's daughter,
By death assuage the fervent wrath of God?'[1]

"At this time Jehovah bears the closest resemblance to His rival Chamos ; he was a savage being, compact of cruelty and injustice. This was what he said : 'You may know that I am the Lord by the corpses laid out along your path.' Don't make any mistake about this, Monsieur de Terremondre—in passing down from Judaism to Christianity, He still retains His savagery, and about Him there still lingers a taste for blood. I don't go so far as to say that in the present century, at the close of the age, He has not become somewhat softened. We are all, nowadays, gliding downwards on an inclined plane of tolerance and indifference, and Jehovah along with us. At any rate, He has ceased to pour out a perpetual flood of threats and curses, and at the present

[1] Est-ce qu'en holocauste aujourd'hui présenté,
Je dois, comme autrefois la fille de Jephté,
Du Seigneur par un mort apaiser la colère ?

moment He only proclaims His vengeance through the mouth of Mademoiselle Deniseau, and no one listens to her. But His principles are the same as of old, and there has been no essential change in His moral system."

"You are a great enemy to our religion," said M. de Terremondre.

"Not at all," said M. Bergeret. "It is true that I find in it what I will call moral and intellectual stumbling-blocks. I even find cruelty in it. But this cruelty is now an ancient thing, polished by the centuries, rolled smooth like a pebble with all its points blunted. It has become almost harmless. I should be much more afraid of a new religion, framed with scrupulous exactitude. Such a religion, even if it were based on the most beautiful and kindly morality, would act at first with inconvenient austerity and painful accuracy. I prefer intolerance rubbed smooth, to charity with a fresh edge to it. Taking one thing with another, it is Abbé Lantaigne who is in the wrong, it is I who am wrong, and it is you, Monsieur de Terremondre, who are right. Over this ancient Judaic-Christian religion so many centuries of human passions, of human hatreds and earthly adorations, so many civilisations—barbaric or refined, austere or self-indulgent, pitiless or tolerant, humble or proud, agricultural, pastoral, warlike, mercantile, indus-

trial, oligarchical, aristocratic, democratic — have passed, that all is now rolled smooth. Religions have practically no effect on systems of morality and they merely become what morality makes them. . . . "

XVI

ADAME Bergeret had a horror of silence and solitude, and now that M. Bergeret never spoke to her and lived apart from her, her room was as terrifying as a tomb to her mind. She never entered it without turning white. Her daughters would, at least, have supplied the noise and movement needed if she were to remain sane; but when an epidemic of typhus broke out in the autumn she sent them to visit their aunt, Mademoiselle Zoé Bergeret, at Arcachon. There they had spent the winter, and there their father meant to leave them, in the present state of his affairs. Madame Bergeret was a domesticated woman, with a housewifely mind. To her, adultery had been nothing more than a mere extension of wedded life, a gleam from her hearth-fire. She had been driven to it by a matronly pride in her position far more than by the wanton promptings of the flesh. She had always intended that her slight lapse with young M. Roux should remain a secret, homely habit, just a taste of adultery that

would merely involve, imply, and confirm that state of matrimony which is held in honour by the world, as well as sanctified by the Church, and which secures a woman in a position of personal safety and social dignity. Madame Bergeret was a Christian wife and knew that marriage is a sacrament whose lofty and lasting results cannot be effaced by any fault such as she had committed, for serious though it might be, it was yet a pardonable and excusable lapse. Without being in a position to estimate her offence with great moral perspicuity, she felt instinctively that it was trifling and simple, being neither malicious, nor inspired by that deep passion which alone can dignify error with the splendour of crime and hurl the guilty woman into the abyss. She not only felt that she was no great criminal, but also that she had never had the chance of being one. Yet now she had to stand watching the entirely unforeseen results of such a trifling episode, as to her terror they slowly and gloomily unfolded themselves before her. She suffered cruel pangs at finding herself alone and fallen within her own house, at having lost the sovereignty of her home, and at having been despoiled, as it were, of her cares of kitchen and store-cupboard. Suffering was not good for her and brought no purification in its train ; it merely awoke in her paltry mind, at one moment the instinct of revolt, and at another, a

passion for self-humiliation. Every day, about three o'clock in the afternoon, she went out and paid visits at her friends' houses. On these expeditions she walked with great strides, a grim, stiff figure with bright eyes, flaming cheeks and gaudy dress. She called on all the lower-middle-class ladies of the town, on Madame Torquet, the dean's wife ; on Madame Leterrier, the rector's wife ; on Madame Ossian Colot, the wife of the prison governor, and on Madame Surcouf, the recorder's wife. She was not received by the society ladies, nor by the wives of the great capitalists. Wherever she went, she poured out a flood of complaints against M. Bergeret, and charged her husband with every variety of fantastic crime that occurred to her feeble imagination, focussed on the one point only. Her usual accusations were that he had separated her from her daughters, had left her penniless, and finally had deserted his home to run about in cafés and, most probably, in less reputable resorts. Wherever she went, she gained sympathy and became an object of the tenderest interest. The pity she aroused grew, spread, and rose in volume. Even Madame Dellion, the ironmaster's wife, although she was prevented from asking her to call, because they belonged to different sets, yet sent a message to her that she pitied her with all her heart, and felt the deepest disgust at M. Bergeret's shame-

ful behaviour. In this way Madame Bergeret went about the town every day, fortifying her hungry soul with the social respect and fair reputation that it craved. But as she mounted her own staircase in the evening, her heart sank within her. Her weak knees would hardly sustain her and she forgot her pride, her longing for vengeance, forgot even the abuse and frivolous scandal that she had spread through the town. To escape from loneliness she longed sincerely to be on good terms with M. Bergeret once more. In such a shallow soul as hers this desire was absolutely sincere and arose quite naturally. Yet it was a vain and useless thought, for M. Bergeret went on ignoring the existence of his wife.

This particular evening Madame Bergeret said as she went into the kitchen :

"Go and ask your master, Euphémie, how he would like his eggs to be cooked."

It was quite a new departure on her side to submit the bill of fare to the master of the house. For of old, in the days of her lofty innocence, she had habitually forced him to partake of dishes which he disliked and which upset the delicate digestion of the sedentary student. Euphémie's mind was not of wide range, but it was impartial and unwavering, and she protested to Madame Bergeret, as she had done several times before on

similar occasions, that it was absolutely useless for her mistress to ask Monsieur anything. He never answered a word, because he was in a "contrairy" mood. But Madame, turning her face away and dropping her eyelids as a sign of determination, repeated the order she had just given.

"Euphémie," she said, "do as I tell you. Go and ask your master how he would like the eggs cooked, and don't forget to tell him that they are new-laid and come from Trécul's."

M. Bergeret was sitting in his study at work on the *Virgilius nauticus*, which a publisher had commissioned him to prepare as an extra embellishment of a learned edition of the *Æneid*, at which three generations of philologists had been working for more than thirty years, and the first sheets of which were already through the press. And now, slip by slip, the professor sat compiling this special lexicon for it. He conceived a sort of veneration for himself as he worked at it, and congratulated himself in these words:

"Here am I, a land-lubber who has never sailed on anything more important than the Sunday steamboat which carries the townsfolk up the river to drink sparkling wine on the slopes of Tuillières in summer time; here am I, a good Frenchman, who has never seen the sea except at Villers; here am I, Lucien Bergeret, acting as the interpreter of

Virgil, the seaman. Here I sit in my study explaining the nautical terms used by a poet who is accurate, learned and exact, in spite of all his rhetoric, who is a mathematician, a mechanician, a geometrician, a well-informed Italian, who was trained in seafaring matters by the sailors who basked in the sun on the sea-shores of Naples and Misenum, who had, maybe, his own galley, and under the clear stars of Helen's twin-brothers, ploughed the blue furrows of the sea between Naples and Athens. Thanks to the excellence of my philological methods I am able to reach this point of perfection, but my pupil, M. Goubin, would be as fully equipped for the task as I."

M. Bergeret took the greatest pleasure in this work, for it kept his mind occupied without any accompanying sense of anxiety or excitement. It filled him with real satisfaction to trace on thin sheets of pasteboard his delicate, regular letters, types and symbols as they were of the mental accuracy demanded in the study of philology. All his senses joined and shared in this spiritual satisfaction, so true is it that the pleasures which man can enjoy are more varied than is commonly supposed. Just now M. Bergeret was revelling in the peaceful joy of writing thus :

Servius believes that Virgil wrote *Attolli malos*[1] in mistake for *Attolli vela*,[2] and the reason which he gives for this rendering is that *cum navigarent, non est dubium quod olli erexerant arbores*.[3] Ascencius takes the same side as Servius, being either forgetful or ignorant of the fact that, on certain occasions, ships at sea are dismasted. When the state of the sea was such that the masts . . ."

M. Bergeret had reached this point in his work when Euphémie opened the study door with the noise that always accompanied her slightest movement, and repeated the considerate message sent by Madame Bergeret to her husband :

" Madame wants to know how you would like your eggs cooked ? "

M. Bergeret's only reply was a gentle request to Euphémie to withdraw. He went on writing :

" ran the risk of breaking, it was customary to lower them, by lifting them out of the well in which their heels were inserted. . . ."

Euphémie stood fixed against the door, while M. Bergeret finished his slip.

" The masts were then stored abaft either on a crossbar or a bridge."

" Sir, Madame told me to say that the eggs come from Trécul's."

[1] *Attolli malos*, for the masts to be raised.

[2] *Attolli vela*, for the sails to be raised.

[3] *Cum navigarent, non est dubium quod olli erexerant arbores*, when they were at sea, there is no doubt that the masts were already up

"*Una omnes fecere pedem.*"[1]

Filled with a sense of sadness M. Bergeret laid down his pen, for he was suddenly overwhelmed with a perception of the uselessness of his work. Unfortunately for his own happiness, he was intelligent enough to recognise his own mediocrity, and, at times, it would actually appear to him in visible shape, like a thin, little, clumsy figure dancing about on his table between the inkstand and the file. He knew it well and hated it, for he would fain have seen his personality come to him under the guise of a lissom nymph. Yet it always appeared to him in its true form, as a lanky, unlovely figure. It shocked him to see it, for he had delicate perceptions and a taste for dainty conceits.

"Monsieur Bergeret," he said to himself, "you are a professor of some distinction, an intelligent provincial, a university man with a tendency to the florid, an average scholar shackled by the barren quests of philology, a stranger to the true science of language, which can be plumbed only by men of broad, unbiassed and trenchant views. Monsieur Bergeret, you are not a scholar, for you are incapable of grasping or classifying the facts of language. Michel Bréal will never mention your poor, little,

[1] *Una omnes fecere pedem*, then with one accord they veered out the sheet.

humble name. You will die without fame, and your ears will never know the sweet accents of men's praise."

"Sir . . . Sir," put in Euphémie in urgent tones, "do answer me. I have no time to hang about. I have my work to do. Madame wants to know how you'd like your eggs done. I got them at Trécul's and they were laid this morning."

Without so much as turning his head, M. Bergeret answered the girl in a tone of relentless gentleness :

"I want you to go and never again to enter my study—at any rate, not until I call you."

Then the professor returned to his day-dream : "How happy is Torquet, our dean ! How happy is Leterrier, our rector ! No distrust of themselves, no rash misgivings to interrupt the smooth course of their equable lives ! They are like that old fellow Mesange, who was so beloved by the immortal goddesses that he survived three generations and attained to the Collège de France and the Institute without having learnt anything new since the holy days of his innocent childhood. He carried with him to his grave the same amount of Greek as he had at the age of fifteen. He died at the close of this century, still revolving in his little head the mythological fancies that the poets of the First Empire had turned into verse beside his cradle.

But I—how comes it that I have such a cruel sense of my own inadequacy and of the laughable folly of all I undertake? For I have a mind as weak as that Greek scholar's, who had a bird's brain as well as a bird's name; I am fully as incapable as Torquet the dean, and Leterrier, the rector, of either system or initiative. I am, in fact, but a foolish, melancholy juggler with words. May it not be a sign of mental supereminence and a mark of my superiority in the realm of abstract thought? This *Virgilius nauticus*, which I use as the touchstone of my powers, is it really my own work and the fruit of my mind? No, it is a task foisted on my poverty by a grasping bookseller in league with a pack of pseudo-scholars who, on the pretext of freeing French scholarship from German tutelage, are bringing back the trivial methods of former times, and forcing me to take part in the philological pastimes of 1820. May the responsibility for it rest on them and not on me! It was no zeal for knowledge, but the thirst for gain, that induced me to undertake this *Virgilius nauticus*, at which I have now been working for three years and which will bring me in five hundred francs: to wit, two hundred and fifty francs on delivery of the manuscript, and two hundred and fifty francs on the day of publication of the volume containing this article. I determined to slake my horrible thirst

for gold! I have failed, not in brain power, but in force of character. That's a very different matter!"

In this way did M. Bergeret marshal the flock of his wandering thoughts. All this time Euphémie had not moved, but at last, for the third time, she spoke to her master:

"Sir. . . . Sir. . . ."

But at this attempt her voice stuck in her throat, strangled by sobs.

When M. Bergeret at last glanced at her, he could see the tears rolling down her round, red, shining cheeks.

She tried to speak, but nothing came from her throat save hoarse croaks, like the call that the shepherds of her native village sound on their goat-horns of an evening. Then she crossed her two arms, bare to the elbow, over her face, showing the fat, white flesh furrowed with long red scratches, and wiped her eyes with the back of her brown hands. Sobs tore her narrow chest and shook her stomach, abnormally enlarged by the tabes from which she had suffered in her seventh year and which had left her deformed. Then she dropped her arms to her side, hid her hands under her apron, stifled her sobs, and exclaimed peevishly, as soon as she could get the words out:

"I cannot live any longer in this house. I

cannot any more. Besides, it isn't a life at all. I would rather go away than see what I do."

There was as much rage as misery in her voice, and she looked at M. Bergeret with inflamed eyes.

She was really very indignant at her master's behaviour, and this not at all because she had always been attached to her mistress. For till quite recently, in the days of her pride and prosperity, Madame Bergeret had overwhelmed her with insult and humiliation and kept her half starved. Neither was it because she knew nothing of her mistress's lapse from virtue, and believed, with Madame Dellion and the other ladies, that Madame Bergeret was innocent. She knew every detail of her mistress's liaison with M. Roux, as did the concierge, the bread-woman, and M. Raynaud's maid. She had discovered the truth long before M. Bergeret knew it. Neither, on the other hand, was it because she approved of the affair; for she strongly censured both M. Roux and Madame Bergeret. For a girl who was mistress of her own person to have a lover seemed a small thing to her, not worth troubling about, when one knows how easily these things happen. She had had a narrow escape herself one night after the fair, when she was close pressed by a lad who wanted to play pranks at the edge of a

ditch. She knew that an accident might happen all in a moment. But in a middle-aged married woman with children such conduct was disgusting. She confessed to the bread-woman one morning that really mistress turned her sick. Personally, she had no hankering after this kind of thing, and if there were no one but her to supply the babies, why then, the world might come to an end for all she cared. But if her mistress felt differently, there was always a husband for her to turn to. Euphémie considered that Madame Bergeret had committed a horribly wicked sin, but she could not bring herself to feel that any sin, however serious, should never be forgiven and should always remain unpardoned. During her childhood, before she hired herself out to service, she used to work with her parents in the fields and vineyards. There she had seen the sun scorch up the vine-flowers, the hail beat down all the corn in the fields in a few minutes; yet, the very next year, her father, mother and elder brothers would be out in the fields, training the vine and sowing the furrow. There, amid the eternal patience of nature, she had learnt the lesson that in this world, alternately scorching and freezing, good and bad, there is nothing that is irreparable, and that, as one pardons the earth itself, so one must pardon man and woman.

It was according to this principle that the people at home acted, and after all, they were very likely quite as good as townsfolk. When Robertet's wife, the buxom Léocadie, gave a pair of braces to her footman to induce him to do what she wanted, she was not so clever that Robertet did not find out the trick. He caught the lovers just in the nick of time, and chastised his wife so thoroughly with a horsewhip that she lost all desire to sin again for ever and ever. Since then Léocadie has been one of the best women in the country : her husband hasn't *that* to find fault with her for. M. Robertet is a man of sense and knows how to drive men as well as cattle : why don't people just do as he did ?

Having been often beaten by her respected father, and being, moreover, a simple, untamed being herself, Euphémie fully understood an act of violence. Had M. Bergeret broken the two house brooms on Madame Bergeret's guilty back, she would have quite approved of his act. One broom, it is true, had lost half its bristles, and the other, older still, had no more hair than the palm of the hand, and served, with the aid of a dish-cloth, to wash down the kitchen tiles. But when her master persisted in a mood of prolonged and sullen spite, the peasant girl considered it hateful, unnatural and positively fiendish. What brought

home to Euphémie all M. Bergeret's crimes with still greater force, was that his behaviour made her work difficult and confusing. For since Monsieur refused to take his meals with Madame, he had to be served in one place and she in another, for although M. Bergeret might stubbornly refuse to recognise his wife's existence, yet she could not sustain even non-existence without sustenance of some sort. "It's like an inn," sighed the youthful Euphémie. Then, since M. Bergeret no longer supplied her with housekeeping money, Madame Bergeret used to say to Euphémie: "You must settle with your master." And in the evening Euphémie would tremblingly carry her book to her master, who would wave her off with an imperious gesture, for he found it difficult to meet the increased expenditure. Thus lived Euphémie, perpetually overwhelmed by difficulties with which she could not cope. In this poisoned air she was losing all her cheerfulness: she was no longer to be heard in the kitchen, mingling the noise of laughter and shouts with the crash of saucepans, with the sizzling of the frying-pan upset on the stove, or with the heavy blows of the knife, as on the chopping-block she minced the meat, together with one of her finger-tips. She no longer revelled in joy, or in noisy grief. She said to herself: "This house is driving me crazy." She pitied

Madame Bergeret, for now she was kindly treated. They used to spend the evening, sitting side by side in the lamp-light, exchanging confidences. It was with her heart full of all these emotions that Euphémie said to M. Bergeret :

"I am going away. You are too wicked. I want to leave."

And again she shed a flood of tears.

M. Bergeret was by no means vexed at this reproach. He pretended, in fact, not to hear it, for he had too much sense not to be able to make allowances for the rudeness shown by an ignorant girl. He even smiled within himself, for in the secret depths of his heart, beneath layers of wise thoughts and fine sayings, he still retained that primitive instinct which persists even in modern men of the gentlest and sweetest character, and which makes them rejoice whenever they see they are taken for ferocious beings, as if the mere power of injuring and destroying were the motive force of living things, their essential quality and highest merit. This, on reflection, is indeed true, since, as life is supported and nourished only upon murder, the best men must be those who slaughter most. Then again, those who, under the stimulus of racial and food-conquering instincts, deal the hardest knocks, obtain the reputation of magnanimity, and please women, who are naturally interested

in securing the strongest mates, and who are mentally incapable of separating the fruitful from the destructive element in man, since these two forces are, in actual fact, indissolubly linked by nature. Hence, when Euphémie in a voice as countrified as a fable by Æsop, told him he was wicked, M. Bergeret, by virtue of his philosophical temperament, felt flattered and fancied he heard a murmur which filled out the gaps in the maid's simple speech, and said : "Learn, Lucien Bergeret, that you are a wicked man, in the vulgar sense of the word—that is to say, you are able to injure and destroy; in other words, you are in a state of defence, in full possession of life, on the road to victory. In your own way, you must know, you are a giant, a monster, an ogre, a man of terror."

But, being a sceptical man and never given to accepting men's opinions unchallenged, he began to ask himself if he were really what Euphémie said. At the first glance into the inner recesses of his nature he concluded that, on the whole, he was not wicked ; that, on the contrary, he was full of pity, highly sensitive to the woes of others, and full of sympathy for the wretched ; that he loved his fellow-men, and would have gladly satisfied their needs by fulfilling all their desires, whether innocent or guilty, for he refused to trammel his human charity with the nets of any moral system,

and for every kind of misery he had compassion at his call. And to him everything that harmed no one was innocent. In this way his heart was kinder than it ought to have been, according to the laws, the morals, and the varying creeds of the nations. Looking at himself in this way, he perceived the truth—that he was not wicked, and the thought caused him some bewilderment. It pained him to recognise in himself those contemptible qualities of mind which do nothing to strengthen the life-force.

With praiseworthy thoroughness, he next set himself to inquire whether he had not thrown off his kindly temper and his peaceable disposition in certain matters, and particularly in this affair of Madame Bergeret. He saw at once that on this special occasion he had acted in opposition to his general principles and habitual sentiments, and that on this point his conduct presented several marked singularities of which he noted down the strangest.

"Chief singularities: I feign to consider her a criminal, and I act as if I had really fallen into this vulgar error. And all the time that her conscience condemns her for having committed adultery with my pupil, M. Roux, I myself regard her adultery as an innocent act, since it has harmed no one. Hence Madame Bergeret's morality is higher than

mine, for, although she believes herself guilty, she forgives herself, while I, who do not consider her guilty at all, refuse to forgive her. My judgment of her is immoral, but merciful; my conduct, however, is moral, but cruel. What I condemn so pitilessly is not her act, which I consider to be merely ridiculous and unseemly: it is herself that I condemn, as being guilty, not of what she has done, but of what she is. The girl Euphémie is in the right: I *am* wicked!"

He patted himself on the back, and revolving these new considerations, said again to himself:

"I am wicked because I act. I knew, before this experience happened to me, that there is no such thing as an innocent action, for to act is to injure or destroy. As soon as I began to act, I became a malefactor."

He had an excellent excuse for speaking thus to himself, since all this time he had been performing a systematic, continuous, and consistent act, in making Madame Bergeret's life unbearable to her, by depriving her of all the comforts needed by her homely common nature, her domesticated character, and her gregarious mind. In a word, he was engaged in driving from his house a disobedient and troublesome wife who had done him good service by being unfaithful to him.

The opportunity she gave he seized gladly,

doing his work with wonderful vigour, considering the weak character he showed in ordinary affairs. For, although M. Bergeret was usually vacillating in purpose and without a will of his own, at this crisis he was driven on by desire, by an invincible Lust. For it is desire, far stronger than will, that, having created the world, now upholds it. In this undertaking of his, M. Bergeret was sustained by unutterable desire, by a masterful Lust to see Madame Bergeret no more. And this untempered, transparent desire had the happy force of a great love, for it was ruffled by no feeling of hatred.

All this time Euphémie stood waiting for her master to answer her, or, at any rate, to hurl furious words at her. For on this point she agreed with Madame Bergeret, and considered silence far more cruel than insult and invective.

At last M. Bergeret broke the silence. He said in a quiet voice: "I discharge you. You will leave this house in a week's time."

Euphémie's sole response was a plaintive, animal cry. For a moment she stood motionless. Then, thunderstruck, heart-broken and wretched, she returned to her kitchen and gazed at the sauce-pans, now dented like battle-armour by her valiant hands. She looked at the chair which had lost its seat—without causing her any inconvenience, however, for the poor girl hardly ever sat down; at the

cistern whose waters had often swamped the house at night by overflowing from a tap left full on ; at the sink with its wastepipe perpetually choked ; at the table notched by the chopping-knife ; at the cast-iron stove all eaten away by the fire ; at the black coal-hole ; at the shelves adorned with paper-lace ; at the blacking-box and the bottle of brass-polish. And standing in the midst of all these witnesses of her weary life, she wept.

On the next day—that is, as they used to say, *l'en demain*, which happened to be market-day—M. Bergeret set out early to call on Deniseau, who kept a registry office for country servants in the Place Saint-Exupère. In the waiting-room he found a score of country girls waiting, some young, some old, some short, ruddy and chubby-cheeked, others tall, yellow and wizened, all differing in face and figure, but all alike in one respect—that is, in the anxious fixity of their gaze, for they all saw their own fate in the person of every caller who happened to open the door. For a moment M. Bergeret stood looking at the group of girls who waited to be hired. Then he passed on into the office adorned with calendars, where Deniseau sat at a table covered with dirty registers and old horse-shoes that served as paper-weights.

He told the man that he required a servant, and apparently he wanted one with quite unusual

qualities, for after ten minutes' conversation he came out in very low spirits. Then, as he crossed the waiting-room a second time, he caught sight of a woman in a dark corner whom he had not noticed the first time. It was a long, thin shape that he beheld, ageless and sexless, crowned by a bald, bony head, with a forehead set like an enormous sphere on a short nose that seemed nothing but nostril. Through her open mouth her great horse-teeth were visible in all their nakedness, and under her drooping lip there was no chin to speak of. She stayed in her corner, neither moving nor looking, perhaps realising that she would not easily find anyone to hire her, and that others would be taken in preference to her. Yet she seemed quite satisfied with herself and quite easy in her mind. She was dressed like the women of the low-lying, agueish lands, and to her wide-brimmed, knitted hat clung pieces of straw.

For a long time M. Bergeret stood looking at her with saturnine admiration. Then, pointing her out to Deniseau, he said: "The one over there will suit me."

"Marie?" asked the man in a tone of surprise.

"Marie," answered M. Bergeret.

XVII

NOW that M. Mazure, the archivist, had at last attained to academic honours, he began to regard the government with genial tolerance. But, as he was never happy unless he was at variance with someone, he now turned his wrath against the clericals, and began to denounce the scheming of the bishops. Meeting M. Bergeret in the Place Saint-Exupère, he warned him of the peril threatening from the clerical party.

"Finding it impossible," said he, "to overturn the Republic, the curés now want to divert it to their own ends."

"That is the ambition of every party," answered M. Bergeret, "and the natural result of our democratic institutions, for democracy itself consists entirely in the struggle of parties, since the nation itself is not at one either in sentiments or interests."

"But," answered M. Mazure, "the unbearable

part of this is that the clericals should put on the mask of liberty in order to deceive the electors."

To this M. Bergeret replied :

"Every party which finds itself shut out from the Government demands liberty, because to do so strengthens the opposition and weakens the party in power. For the same reason the party in power curtails liberty as much as possible and it passes, in the sacred name of the sovereign people, the most despotic laws. For there is no charter which can safeguard liberty against the acts of the sovereign nation. Democratic despotism theoretically has no limits, but in actual fact, and considering only the present period, I grant that its power is not boundless. Democracy has given us 'the black laws,' but it never puts them in force."

"Monsieur Bergeret," said the archivist, "let me give you a piece of good advice. You are a Republican : then don't fire on your own friends. If we don't look out, we shall fall back into the rule of the Church. Reaction is making terrible progress. The whites are always the whites ; the blues are always the blues, as Napoleon said. You are a blue, Monsieur Bergeret. The clerical party will never forgive you for calling Jeanne d'Arc a mascotte, and even I can scarcely pardon you for it, for Jeanne d'Arc and Danton are my two special idols. You are a free-thinker.

Then join us in our anti-clerical campaign! Let us unite our forces! It is union alone that can give us the strength to conquer. The highest interests are at stake in the fight against the church party."

"It is just party interest that I see mainly at work in that conflict," answered M. Bergeret. "But if I were obliged to join a party at all, it must needs be yours, since it is the only one I could help without too much hypocrisy. But, happily, I am not reduced to this extremity, and I am by no means tempted to clip the wings of my mind in order to force it into a political compartment. To tell the truth, I am quite indifferent to your disputes, because I feel how empty they are. The dividing line between you and the clericals is a trifling matter at bottom. They would succeed you in office, provided there were no change in the position of the individual. And in the State it is the position of the individual that alone matters. Opinions are but verbal jugglery, and it is only opinions that separate you from the church party. You have no moral system to oppose to theirs, for the simple reason that in France we have no religious code existing in opposition to a code of civil morality. Those who believe that we have these two opposing systems of morality are merely deceived by appearances. I will prove this to you in a few words.

"In every era we find that there are habits of life which determine a line of thought common to all men. Our moral ideas are not the fruit of thought, but the result of habit. No one dares openly to resist these ideas, because obedience to them is followed by honours, and revolt against them by humiliation. They are adopted by the entire community without question, independently of religious creeds and philosophic opinions, and they are as keenly upheld by those whose deeds by no means conform to their dictates, as they are by those who constrain themselves to live according to the rules laid down by them. The origin of these ideas is the only point that admits of discussion: so-called free-thinkers believe that the rules which direct their conduct are natural in origin, whilst pious souls discern the origin of the rules they obey in their religion, and these rules are found to agree, or nearly so, not because they are universal, that is, divine and natural, as people delight to say, but, on the contrary, because they are the product of the period and clime, deduced from the same habits, derived from the same prejudices. Each epoch has its predominant moral idea, which springs neither from religion nor from philosophy, but from habit, the sole force that is capable of linking men in the same bond of feeling, for the moment we touch reason we touch the dividing principle in

humanity, and the human race can only exist on condition that it never reflects on what is essential to its own existence. Morality governs creeds, which are ever matters of dispute, whilst morality itself is never analysed.

"And simply because a moral code is the sum-total of the prejudices of the community, there cannot possibly exist two rival codes at the same time and in the same place. I could illustrate this truth by a great number of examples, but none of them could be more to the point than that of the Emperor Julian, with whose works I have lately been making myself somewhat familiar. Julian, who fought on the side of the Pagan gods with such staunchness and magnanimity—Julian, who was a sun-worshipper, yet professed all the moral sentiments of the Christians. Like them, he scorned the pleasures of the flesh and vaunted the efficacy of fasting, because it brings a man into union with the divine. Like them, he upheld the doctrine of atonement and believed in the purifying effect of suffering. He had himself initiated, too, into mysteries which satisfied his keen desire for purity, renunciation and divine love, quite as efficaciously as the mysteries of the Christian religion. In a word, his neo-paganism was, morally speaking, own brother to the rising cult of Christianity. And what is there surprising in that? The two creeds

were the twin children of Rome and of the East. They both corresponded to the same human habits, to the same deep instincts in the Asiatic and Latin worlds. Their souls were alike, though in name and phraseology they differed from each other. This difference was enough to make them deadly enemies, for it is about mere words that men usually quarrel. It is for the sake of words that they most willingly kill and are killed. Historians are in the habit of asking anxiously what would have become of civilisation, if the philosopher-emperor had conquered the Galilean by winning a victory that he had rightly earned by his constancy and moderation. It is no easy game thus to reconstruct history. Yet it seems clear enough that in this case, polytheism, which had already by the reign of Julian been reduced to a species of monotheism, would have submitted to the new mental habits of the time and would have assumed precisely the same moral form that one sees it taking under Christianity. Look at all the great revolutionary leaders and tell me if there is a single one who showed himself in any way an original thinker, as far as morality is concerned. Robespierre's ideas of righteousness were to the end those in which he had been trained by the priests of Arras.

"You are a free-thinker, Monsieur Mazure, and

you think that man's object on this planet ought to be to get the maximum amount of happiness out of it. M. de Terremondre, who is a Catholic, believes, on the contrary, that we are all here in a place of expiation in order that we may gain eternal life through suffering. Yet, notwithstanding the contradiction in your creeds, you have both practically the same moral code, because morality is independent of creeds."

"You make fun of things," said M. Mazure, "and you make me want to swear like a trooper. Religious ideas, when all is said and done, enter into the formation of moral ideas to a degree that one cannot ignore. I am therefore right in saying that there is such a thing as Christian morality, and that I heartily disapprove of it."

"But, my dear sir," answered the professor gently, "there are as many Christian codes of morality as there are ages during which Christianity has lasted and countries into which she has penetrated. Religions, like chameleons, copy the colours of the soil over which they run. Morality, though it is peculiar to each generation, since it is the one link to bind it together, changes incessantly along with the habits and customs of which she is the most striking representative, like an enlarged reflection on a wall. So true

is this fact that it may actually be affirmed that the morality of these Catholics who offend you resembles your own very closely, and yet differs widely from that of a Catholic at the time of the League—to say nothing of those Christians of the apostolic ages who would seem to M. de Terremondre most extraordinary beings, were it possible for him to see them at close quarters. Be impartial and just, if you can, and tell me this: in what essential respect does your morality as a free-thinker differ from the morality of those good people who to-day go to Mass? They profess, as the bedrock of their creed, the doctrine of the atonement, but they are as indignant as you when that doctrine is put before them in a striking manner by their own priests. They profess to believe that suffering is good and pleasing to God. But—do you ever see them sit down on nails? You have proclaimed toleration for every creed: they marry Jewesses and have stopped burning their fathers-in-law. What ideas have you which they do not share with you about sexual questions, about the family, about marriage, except that you allow divorce, though you take good care not to recommend it? They believe it is damnation to look at a woman and lust after her. Yet at dinners and parties are the necks of their women any less bare than the

necks of yours? Do they wear dresses that reveal less of their figures? And do they bear in mind the words of Tertullian about widows' raiment? Are they veiled and do they hide their hair? Do you not settle their fashions? Do you insist that they shall go naked because you don't believe that Eve covered herself with a branch of a fig-tree under the curse of Javeh? In what way do your ideas about your country differ from theirs? For they exhort you to serve and defend it, just as if their own abiding city were not in the heavens. Or about forced military service, to which they submit, with the solitary reservation of one point in ecclesiastical discipline, which in practice they yield? Or on war, in which they will fight side by side with you, whenever you wish, although their God gave them the command: "Thou shalt not kill." Are you anarchical and cosmopolitan enough to separate from them on these important questions in practical life? What can you name which is peculiar to you alone? You cannot even adduce the duel, which, on account of its being fashionable, is a part of their code as of yours, although it is neither in accordance with their principles, since both their kings and priests forbid it, nor with yours, for it is based on the incredible intervention of God Himself. Have you not the same moral code

with respect to the organisation of labour, to private property and capital, to the whole organisation of society as it is to-day, under which you both endure injustice with equal patience—as long as you don't personally suffer from it? You would have to become Socialists for things to be otherwise, and were you to become socialistic, so doubtless would they. You are willing to tolerate injustice that survives from bygone days, every time that it works in your favour. And, on their side, your ostensible opponents gratefully accept the results of the Revolution, whenever it is a question of acquiring a fortune derived from some former impropriator of national property. They are parties to the Concordat, and so are you; so that even religion links you together.

"Their creed has so little effect on their feelings that they love the life they ought to despise, quite as much as you do; and they cling as closely to their possessions, which are a stumbling-block in the way of their salvation. Having practically the same customs as you, they have practically the same moral code. You quibble with them as to matters which only interest politicians and which have no connection with the organisation of a society which cares not a whit about your rival claims. Faithful to the same traditions, ruled by

the same prejudices, living in the same depths of ignorance, you devour one another like crabs in a basket. As one watches your conflicts of frogs and mice, one no longer craves for undiluted civil government."

XVIII

HE coming of Marie was like the entrance of death into the house. At the very first sight of her, Madame Bergeret knew that her day was over.

Euphémie sat for a long while on her caneless chair, silent and motionless, but with flushed cheeks. Her deep-rooted attachment to her employers and her employers' house was instinctive, but sure, and, like a dog's love, not dependent on reason. She shed no tears, but fever spots came out on her lips. Her good-bye to Madame Bergeret was said with all the solemnity of a pious, countrified heart. During the five years of her service in the house she had endured at Madame Bergeret's hands, not only abusive violence, but hard avarice, for she was fed but meagrely; on her side, she had given way to fits of insolence and disobedience, and she had slandered her mistress among the other servants. But she was a Christian, and at the bottom of her

heart she revered her pastors and masters as she did her father and mother. Snivelling with grief, she said :

"Good-bye, Madame. I will pray to the good God for you, that He may make you happy. I wish I could have said good-bye to the young ladies."

Madame Bergeret knew that she was being hunted out of the house, like this young girl, but she would not show how moved she was, for fear of seeming undignified.

"Go, child," said she, "and settle your wages with Monsieur."

When M. Bergeret handed her her wages, she slowly counted out the amount and moving her lips as though in prayer, made her calculations three times over. She examined the coins anxiously, not being sure of her bearings among so many different varieties. Then she put this little property, her sole wealth in all the world, into the pocket of her skirt, under her handkerchief. Next she dug her hand deep into her pocket, and having taken all these precautions, said :

"You have always been good to me, Monsieur, and I wish you every happiness. But, all the same, you have driven me away."

"You think I am a wicked man," answered M. Bergeret. "But if I send you away, my good

girl, I do it regretfully and only because it is absolutely necessary. If I can help you in any way, I shall be very glad to do so."

Euphémie passed the back of her hand over her eyes, sniffed aloud and said softly, with big tears flowing down her cheeks :

"There's nobody wicked here."

She went out, closing the door behind her as noiselessly as possible, and M. Bergeret began to picture her standing at the bottom of the waiting-room in Deniseau's office, with anxious looks fixed on the door, among the melancholy crowd of girls waiting to be hired, in her white head-dress with her blue cotton umbrella stuck between her knees.

Meanwhile Marie, the stable-girl, who had never in her life waited on anything but beasts, was filled with amazement and stupefaction at the ways of these townsfolk, till the terror that she communicated to others began to overwhelm her own mind. She squatted in her kitchen and gazed at the saucepans. Bacon soup was the only thing she could make and dialect the only language she understood. She was not even well recommended, for it turned out that she had not only lived loosely, but was in the habit of drinking brandy and even spirits of wine.

The first visitor to whom she opened the door was Captain Aspertini, who, in passing through the

town, had called to see M. Bergeret. She evidently made a deep impression on the Italian savant's mind, for no sooner had he greeted his host than he began to speak of the maid with that interest which ugliness always inspires when it is overwhelmingly terrible.

"Your maid, Monsieur Bergeret," said he, "reminds me of that expressive face which Giotto has painted on an arch of the church at Assisi. It represents that Being to whom no one ever opens the door with a smile, and was suggested by a verse in Dante.

"That reminds me," continued the Italian; "have you seen the portrait of Virgil in mosaic that your compatriots have just discovered at Sousse in Algeria? It is a picture of a Roman with a wide, low forehead, a square head and a strong jaw, and is not in the least like the beautiful youth whom they used to tell us was Virgil. The bust which for a long time was taken for a portrait of the poet is really a Roman copy of a Greek original of the fourth century and represents a young god worshipped in the mysteries of Eleusis. I think I may claim the honour of being the first to give the true explanation of this figure in my pamphlet on the child Triptolemus. But do you know this Virgil in mosaic, Monsieur Bergeret?"

"As well as I can judge from the photograph I have seen," answered M. Bergeret, "this African mosaic seems the copy of an original full of character. This portrait might quite stand for Virgil, and it is by no means impossible that it is an authentic portrait of him. Your Renaissance scholars, Monsieur Aspertini, always depicted the author of the *Æneid* with the features of a sage. The old Venetian editions of Dante that I have turned over in our library are full of wood engravings in which Virgil wears the beard of a philosopher. The next age made him as beautiful as a young god. Now we have him with a square jaw and wearing a fringe of hair across his forehead in the Roman style. The mental effect produced by his work has varied just as much. Every literary age creates pictures from it which are entirely different according to the period. And without recalling the legends of the Middle Ages about Virgil the necromancer, it is a fact that the Mantuan is admired for reasons that change according to the period. In him Macrobius hailed the Sibyl of the Empire. It was his philosophy that Dante and Petrarch seized upon, while Chateaubriand and Victor Hugo discovered in him the forerunner of Christianity. For my part, being but a juggler with words, I only use his works as a philological pastime. You, Monsieur Aspertini, see him in the

guise of a great storehouse of Roman antiquities, and that is perhaps the most solidly valuable part of the *Æneid*. The truth is that we are in the habit of hanging our ideas upon the letter of these ancient texts. Each generation forms a new conception of these masterpieces of antiquity and thus endows them with a kind of progressive immortality. My colleague Paul Stapfer has said many good things on this head."

"Very noteworthy things indeed," answered Captain Aspertini. "But he does not entertain such hopeless views as yours as to the ebb and flow of human opinions."

Thus did these two good fellows toss from one to the other those glorious and beautiful ideas by which life is embellished.

"Do tell me what has become," asked Captain Aspertini, "of that soldierly Latinist whom I met here, that charming M. Roux, who seemed to value military glory at its true worth, for he disdained to be a corporal."

M. Bergeret replied curtly that M. Roux had returned to his regiment.

"When last I passed through the town," continued Captain Aspertini, "on the second of January I think it was, I caught this young savant under the lime-tree in the courtyard of the library, chatting with the young porteress, whose ears, I

remember, were very red. And you know that is a sign that she was listening with pleased excitement. There could be nothing prettier than that dainty little ruby shell clinging above the white neck. With great discretion I pretended not to see them, in order that I might not be like the Pythagorean philosopher who used to harass lovers in Metapontus. That is a very charming young girl, with her red, flame-like hair and her delicate skin, faintly dappled with freckles, yet so pearly that it seems lit up from within. Have you ever noticed her, Monsieur Bergeret?"

M. Bergeret replied by a nod, for he had often noticed her, and found her very much to his taste. He was too honourable a man and had too much prudence and respect for his position ever to have taken any liberty with the young porteress at the library. But the delicate colouring, the thin, supple figure, the graceful beauty of this girl had more than once floated before his eyes in the yellow pages of Servius and Domat, when he had been sitting over them a long while. Her name was Mathilde and she had the reputation of being fond of pretty lads. Although M. Bergeret was usually very indulgent towards lovers, the idea of M. Roux finding favour with Mathilde was distinctly distasteful to him.

"It was in the evening, after I had been reading

there," continued Captain Aspertini. "I had copied three unpublished letters of Muratori, which were not in the catalogue. As I was crossing the court where they keep the remains of ancient buildings in the town, I saw, under the lime-tree near the well and not far from the pillar of the Romano-Gallic boatmen, the young porteress with the golden hair. She was listening with downcast eyes to the remarks of your pupil, M. Roux, while she balanced the great keys at the end of her fingers. What he said was doubtless very like what the herdsman of the Oaristys[1] said to the goat-girl. There was little doubt as to the gist of his remarks. I felt sure, in fact, that he was making an assignation. For, thanks to the skill I have acquired in interpreting the monuments of ancient art, I immediately grasped the meaning of this group."

He went on with a smile:

"I cannot, Monsieur Bergeret, really feel all the subtleties, all the niceties of your beautiful French tongue, but I do not like to use the word 'girl' or 'young girl' to describe a child like this porteress of your municipal library. Neither can one use the word maid,[2] which is obsolete and has degenerated in meaning. And I would say in passing, it is a pity that this is the case. It would be

[1] First idyll of André Chénier.

[2] *Pucelle.*

ungracious to call her a young person, and I can see nothing but the word nymph to suit her. But, pray, Monsieur Bergeret, do not repeat what I told you about the nymph of the library, lest it should get her into trouble. These secrets need not be divulged to the mayor or the librarians. I should be most distressed, if I thought I had inadvertently done the slightest harm to your nymph."

"It is true," thought M. Bergeret, "that my nymph is pretty."

He felt vexed, and at this moment could scarcely have told whether he was more angry with M. Roux for having found favour in the eyes of the library porteress, or for having seduced Madame Bergeret.

"Your nation," said Captain Aspertini, "has attained to the highest mental and moral culture. But it still retains, as a relic of the barbarism in which it was so long plunged, a kind of uncertainty and awkwardness in dealing with love affairs. In Italy love is everything to the lovers, but of no concern to the outside world. Society in general feels no interest in a matter which only concerns the chief actors in it. An unbiassed estimate of licence and passion saves us from cruelty and hypocrisy."

For some considerable time Captain Aspertini continued to entertain his French friend with his

views on different points in morals, art and politics. Then he rose to take leave, and catching sight of Marie in the hall, said to M. Bergeret :

"Pray don't take offence at what I said about your cook. Petrarch also had a servant of rare and peculiar ugliness."

XIX

S soon as he had removed from Madame Bergeret, deposed, the management of his house, M. Bergeret himself took command, and a very bad job he made of it. Yet in excuse it should be said that the maid Marie never carried out his orders, since she never understood them. But since action is the essential condition of life and one can by no means avoid it, Marie acted, and was led by her natural gifts into the most unlucky decisions and the most noxious deeds. Sometimes, however, the light of her genius was quenched by drunkenness. One day, having drunk all the spirits of wine kept for the lamp, she lay stretched unconscious on the kitchen tiles for forty hours. Her awaking was always terrible, and every movement she made was followed by catastrophe. She succeeded in doing what had been beyond the powers of anyone else—in splitting the marble chimney-piece by dashing a candlestick on it. She took to cooking all the food in a

frying-pan, amid deafening clamour and poisonous smells, and nothing that she served was eatable.

Shut up alone in the solitude of her bedroom, Madame Bergeret screamed and sobbed with mingled grief and rage, as she watched the ruin of her home. Her misery took on strange, unheard-of shapes that were agony to her conventional soul and became ever more formidable. Until now M. Bergeret had always handed over to her the whole of his monthly salary, without even keeping back his cigarette money from it. But she no longer received a penny from him, and as she had dressed expensively during the gay time of her liaison with M. Roux, and even more expensively during her troublous times when she was upholding her dignity by constantly visiting her entire circle, she was now beginning to be dunned by her milliner and dressmaker, and Messrs. Achard, a firm of outfitters, who did not regard her as a regular customer, actually issued a writ against her, which on this particular evening struck consternation into the proud heart of the daughter of Pouilly. When she perceived that these unprecedented trials were the unexpected, but fatal, results of her sin, she began to perceive the heinousness of adultery. With this thought came a memory of all she had been taught in her youth about this unparalleled, this unique crime; for, in

truth, neither envy, nor avarice, nor cruelty bring such shame to the sinner as this one offence of adultery.

As she stood on the hearthrug before stepping into bed, she opened the neck of her nightdress, and dropping her chin, looked down at the shape of her body. Foreshortened in this way beneath the cambric, it looked like a warm white mass of cushions and pillows, lit up by the rays of the lamplight. She knew nothing of the beauty of the simple human form, having merely the dressmaker's instinct for style, and never asked herself whether these outlines below her eyes were lovely or not. Neither did she find grounds for humiliation or self-glorification in this fleshly envelope; she never even recalled the memory of past pleasures: the only feeling that came was one of troubled anxiety at the sight of the body whose secret impulses had worked such consequences in her home and outside it.

She was a being of moral and religious instincts, and sufficiently philosophic to grasp the absolute value of the points in a game of cards: the idea came to her then that an act in itself entirely trivial might be great in the world of ideas. She felt no remorse, because she was devoid of imagination, and having a rational conception of God, felt that she had already been sufficiently punished.

But, at the same time, since she followed the ordinary line of thought in morality and conceived that a woman's honour could only be judged by the common criterion, since she had formed no colossal plan of overthrowing the moral scheme in order to manufacture for herself an outrageous innocence, she could feel no quietness, no satisfaction in life, nor could she enjoy any sense of the inner peace that sustains the mind in tribulation.

Her troubles were the more harassing because they were so mysterious, so indefinitely prolonged. They unwound themselves like the ball of red string that Madame Magloire, the confectioner in the Place Saint-Exupère, kept on her counter in a boxwood case, and which she used to tie up hundreds of little parcels by means of the thread that passed through a hole in the cover. It seemed to Madame Bergeret that she would never see the end of her worries ; she even, under sadness and regret, began to acquire a certain look of spiritual beauty.

One morning she looked at an enlarged photograph of her father, whom she had lost during the first year of her married life, and standing in front of it, she wept, as she thought of the days of her childhood, of the little white cap worn at her first communion, of her Sunday walks when she went to

drink milk at the Tuilerie with her cousins, the two Demoiselles Pouilly of the Dictionary, of her mother, still alive, but now an old lady living in her little native town, far away at the other end of France in the *département du Nord*. Madame Bergeret's father, Victor Pouilly, a headmaster and the author of a popular edition of Lhomond's grammar, had entertained a lofty notion of his social dignity in the world and of his intellectual prowess. Being overshadowed and patronised by his elder brother, the great Pouilly of the Dictionary, being also under the thumb of the University authorities, he took it out of everybody else and became prouder and prouder of his name, his Grammar, and his gout, which was severe. In his pose he expressed the Pouilly dignity, and to his daughter his portrait seemed to say: "My child, I pass over, I purposely pass over everything in your conduct which cannot be considered exactly conventional. You should recognise the fact that all your troubles come from having married beneath you. In vain I flattered myself that I had raised him to our level. This Bergeret is an uneducated man, and your original mistake, the source of all your troubles, my daughter, was your marriage." And Madame Bergeret gave ear to this speech, while the wisdom and kindness of her father, so clearly stamped on it, sustained her drooping

courage in a measure. Yet, step by step, she began to yield to fate. She ceased to pay denunciatory visits in the town, where, in fact, she had already tired out the curiosity of her friends by the monotonous tenour of her complaints. Even at the rector's house they began to believe that the stories which were told in the town about her liaison with M. Roux were not entirely fables. She had allowed herself to be compromised, and she wearied them; they let her plainly see both facts. The only person whose sympathy she still retained was Madame Dellion, and to this lady she remained a sort of allegorical figure of injured innocence. But although Madame Dellion, being of higher rank, pitied her, respected her, admired her, she would not receive her. Madame Bergeret was humiliated and alone, childless, husbandless, homeless, penniless.

One last effort she made to resume her rightful position in the house. It was on the morning after the most miserable and wretched day that she had ever spent. After having endured the insolent demands of Mademoiselle Rose, the modiste, and of Lafolie, the butcher, after having caught Marie stealing the three francs seventy-five centimes left by the laundress on the dining-room sideboard, Madame Bergeret went to bed so full of misery and fear that she could not sleep. Her

overwhelming troubles brought on an attack of romantic fancy, and in the shades of night she saw a vision of Marie pouring out a poisonous potion that M. Bergeret had prepared for her. With the dawn her fevered terrors fled, and having dressed carefully, she entered M. Bergeret's study with an air of quiet gravity. So little had he expected her that she found the door open.

"Lucien! Lucien!" said she.

She called upon the innocent names of their three daughters. She begged and implored, while she gave a fair enough description of the wretched state of the house. She promised that for the future she would be good, faithful, economical and good-tempered. But M. Bergeret would not answer.

Kneeling at his feet, she sobbed and twisted the arms that had once been so imperious in their gestures. He deigned neither to see nor to hear her.

She showed him the spectacle of a Pouilly at his feet. But he only took up his hat and went out. Then she got up and ran after him, and with outstretched fist and lips drawn back shouted after him from the hall:

"I never loved you. Do you hear that? Never, not even when I first married you! You are hideous, you are ridiculous and everything else

that's horrid. And everyone in the town knows that you are nothing but a ninnyhammer . . . yes, a ninnyhammer. . . ."

She had never heard this word save on the lips of Pouilly of the Dictionary, who had been in his grave for more than twenty years, and now it recurred to her mind suddenly, as though by a miracle. She attached no definite meaning to it, but as it sounded excessively insulting, she shouted down the staircase after him, "Ninny-hammer, ninnyhammer!"

It was her last effort as a wife. A fortnight after this interview Madame Bergeret appeared before her husband and said, this time in quiet, resolute tones, "I cannot remain here any longer. It is your doing entirely. I am going to my mother's; you must send me Marianne and Juliette. Pauline I will let you have. . . ."

Pauline was the eldest; she was like her father, and between them there existed a certain sympathy.

"I hope," added Madame Bergeret, "that you will make a suitable allowance for your two daughters who will live with me. For myself I ask nothing."

When M. Bergeret heard these words, when he saw her at the goal whither he had guided her by foresight and firmness, he tried to conceal his joy,

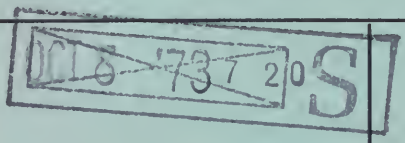
for fear lest, if he let it be detected, Madame Bergeret might abandon an arrangement that suited him admirably.

He made no answer, but he bent his head in sign of consent.

PQ
2251
M2813
1910

THE LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
Santa Barbara

THIS BOOK IS DUE ON THE LAST DATE
STAMPED BELOW.



Series 9482

175 mt
UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
A 000 795 172 6